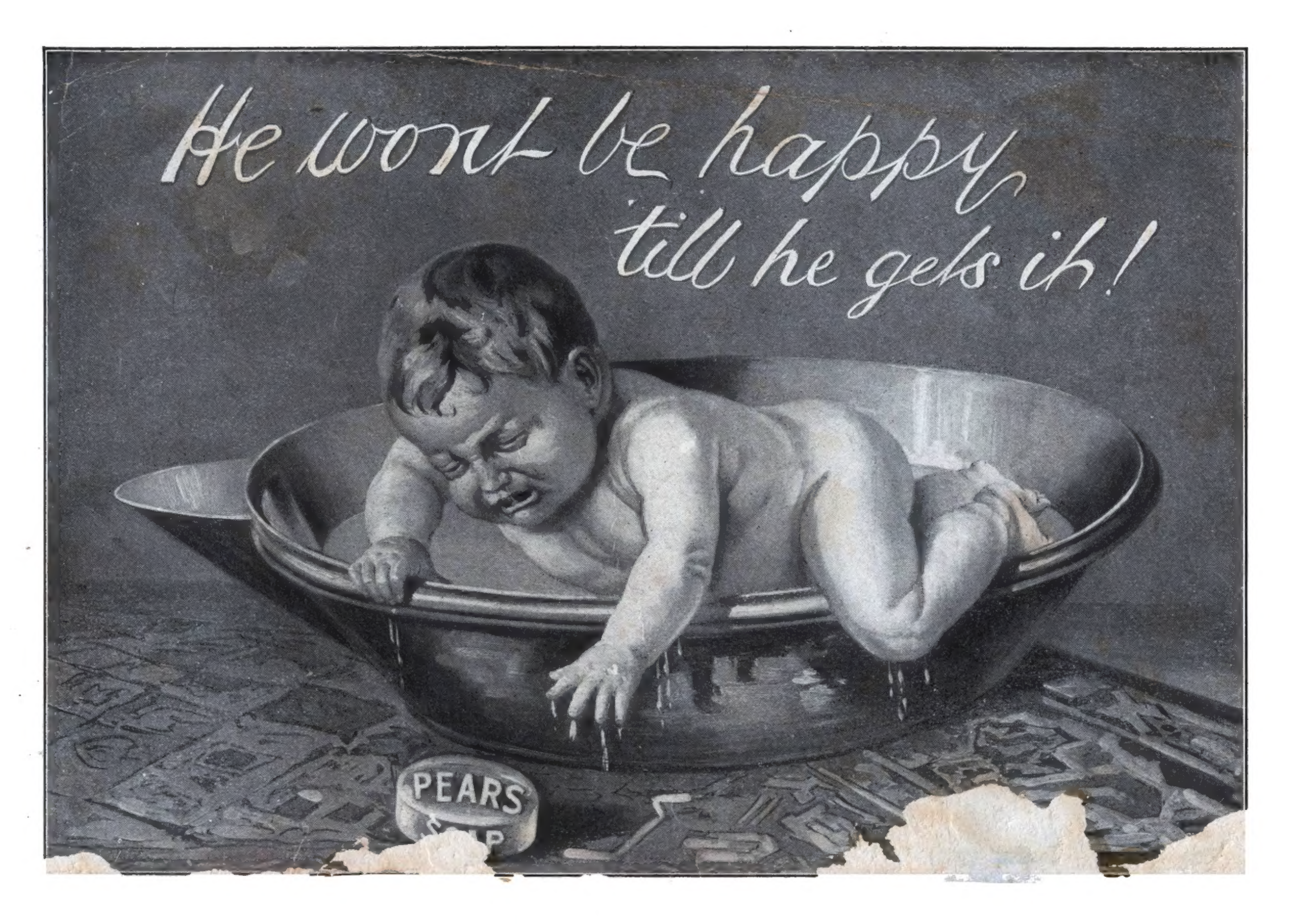

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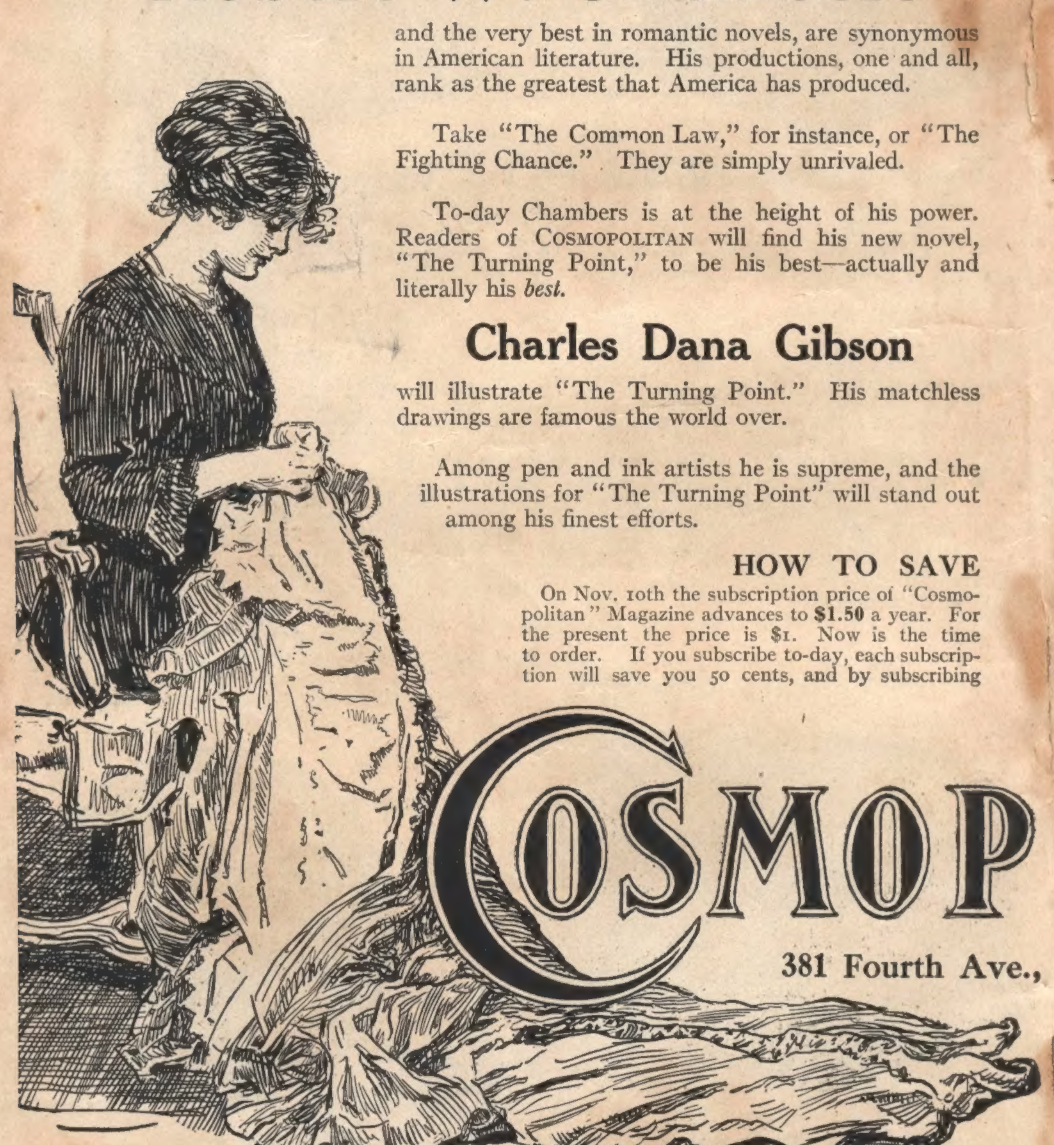
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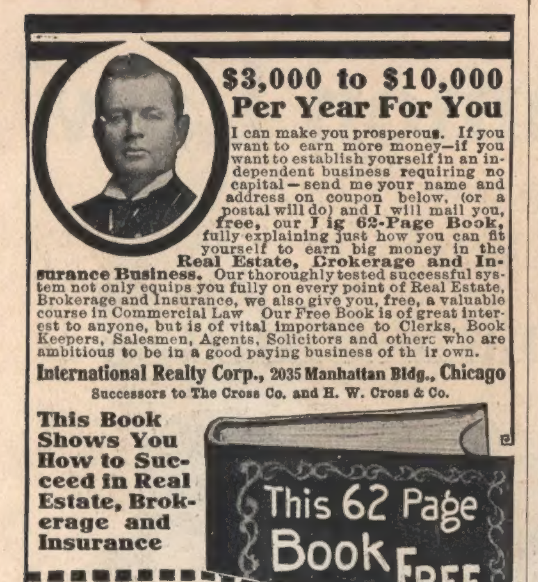
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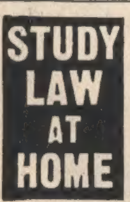
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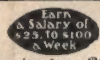
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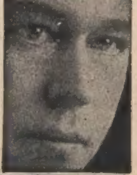
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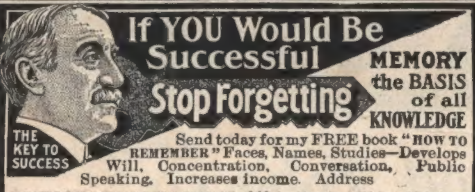


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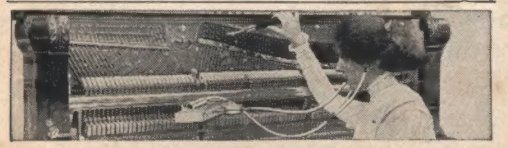
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THE POPULAR MAGAZINE

VOL. XXII. DECEMBER 1, 1911. No. 4.

The Golden Moccasins

By Roy Norton

Author of "Justice in the Rough," "Willow Creek" Stories, Etc.

A reef of gold, red gold, gold the color of blood, as if the blood of all those who sought it had stained it deep down into the frozen soil. This is the story of the mad quest for that gold, the gold that put a curse on all who sought it. Roy Norton has done many splendid stories of Alaska, but none with the grip and strength of this one, in which he tells of the grim struggles of those who went on this most desperate search for fortune in the frozen North.

(***A Complete Novel***)

AND the gold was red—red as blood—like as if the blood of them that had died for it on the long, long trail had stained it clean down into the frozen mud! And I had some of it in my hands—so! In these hands! And it ran between my fingers like little frozen drops of blood! And then I lost it, and I'll never find it again! Never!"

I heard a thin, cracked voice above me, and, leaning on my shovel, looked up to where sat an old man with hands held out, lifting them up and down, clawlike, with the palms upward, and fingers opened as if still scooping up and letting fall through them the streams of gold, red and hard, like frozen blood.

I had not seen him before. I did not know when he had come. His hair hung in long gray strands from under his mink cap, and the cap was so old that the fur was worn away to show the black, greasy skin beneath. His hair dropped to his shoulders, and covered his ears, and joined the straggling, white, unkempt beard that covered his face. His parka was too large for him, and had apparently been worn to the verge of uselessness. Now the sleeves were rolled up, to expose the skinny old arms, which were more like the scaly, attenuated legs of a bird than the members of a human body. His trousers were patched with anything that had come to hand until the original color was lost. His mukluks, the skin boots of the old Alaska, were patched, also, and frayed until they no longer protected his feet.

He did not notice me, but reached his withered hands downward, made an imaginary scoop between his feet, held them up again, and repeated:

"Gold! Red gold! Red as blood!"

He did not look at me until my curt "Hello!" aroused him, and then his hands held themselves poised, and he

shifted his bleached blue eyes toward me, and appeared to be trying to recall me to his recollection.

"I don't know you," he said soberly.

"I don't suppose you do," I answered. "I just came in. I'm from Cassiar."

Some remnant of sanity seemed to control the faded eyes, and the withered hands dropped again to their normal position of rest.

"Cassiar? I used to work there. So you're no chechahco, eh? And I've been to Killisnu. Know Killisnu and old Bill Joyce, him they called Killisnuish? And Bevins, and Sinclair, and Chapman, and ——" his voice trailed off into a list of inarticulate names, as his mind reverted to the past.

"That's old Bill Wilton. Touched he is, poor old cuss!" said a soft, growling voice behind me, and I turned to the man working with me, through whom I had come from Circle City, far up on the lazy stretches of the Yukon River.

He put a finger on his lips, and added: "Don't pay any attention to him. Get Cavanaugh to tell you about it when old Bill isn't around. Bill's got ears like a burro, and he's—well, he's sensitive."

He resumed his shovel again, and I did likewise, knowing that the day was waning, and that we must try to get the last of the pay dump we had bought shoveled in before our scant supply of water, impounded in the dam above, had exhausted itself; but I thought of the little information my partner, Dan Hillyer, had vouchsafed me, and wondered at the strange old man who still sat above us on the bank, and still reached his hands down now and then, scooped up the dried gravel, and let it run through his fingers with that monotonous singsong of gold—"Red gold! Red as blood!"

I looked up in time to see a girl come behind him, and lay a gentle hand on his shoulder. My work was forgotten in the instant. My partner called to her, and lifted his hat, and she smiled at him gravely, and with friendliness. Then she leaped down the bank with nimble grace, and met him as, still holding his hat, he advanced.

"Why, Bessie," he said, with his slow drawl, smiling at her, "you've grown to be a woman—all in a couple of years! And prettier'n ever. How are you, anyway?"

She laughed, and I noted that her lips were red, her teeth white and even, and that I was enchained by her eyes. They were like those one dreams of sometimes—eyes that are not quite plain in their message, but deep, and soft, and intelligent. Hers were tempered by some suggestion of lasting sadness, and I wondered if it had anything to do with the wreck of a man on the bank above, still sifting pebbles. I was to have this answered by Hillyer's introduction.

"Tom," he said, turning to me, "this is Bessie Wilton. That's her daddy up there on the bank. Bess and me's been friends since the day she was born, and that's pretty close to twenty year ago, ain't it, Bess?"

She did not smile when she shook hands with me in acknowledging the introduction, but gave me a long, steady scrutiny, as if wondering who I was, and what my character. I felt the need to answer her unasked question, but was spared the trouble by Dan.

"Tom Amann's his full name," he said, "and we hooked up together down in the Cassiar. He's from the Mother Lode mines, and is all right. He's an old friend of Cavanaugh's. Came on down here after I'd come ahead to see whether she was any good in this camp. Cassiar was petered out."

"But you must have made something from it," she said, addressing her remarks impersonally to both Dan and me, "or you couldn't have bought Markam's pay dump."

I did not feel called upon to answer or explain that the purchase had been a gamble, pure and simple, and that Markam, hurrying out to the States with gold from another claim, had made a mistake when he sold us this part of his winter's work; for we were cleaning up ten times as much as we had paid for it. My partner laughed, with his long-drawn, soft rumble, and his next words diverted her from the topic.

"How's the old man making it? Is he getting any better?"

Her face became more grave as she turned and looked at her father, on the bank.

"I don't know," she answered hesitatingly. "There are days at a time when he seems better, and says nothing of—of what he suffered. Then there are other days when he rambles on continually. Once, last spring, when the river broke and the green came out on the trees back on the hills, I was disturbed in the night. It was a sort of stealthy noise. I got up and looked in his part of the cabin. He was making a pack, and his old, mildewed pack straps were spread out on the floor, with the ragged old canvas laid over them, and he was laying bacon and beans, and baking powder and flour, in parcels on top of it. 'It's spring,' he said; 'it's spring, and I must be off. I'll find it for you this time, girl.' And it was all I could do to get him to postpone his trip. Sometimes I give up hope. Then again I have more courage, and think perhaps he will get well."

She stopped speaking, and I saw that my partner's face was grave with sympathy, which she appeared to appreciate.

"But what are you doing?" he asked directly, and with the frontiersman's camaraderie which prompted him to speak of her financial affairs as if they were public.

"Oh, I am working for Mr. Cavanaugh," she answered easily. "I'm in the trading post now; keep the books, when he will let me, read his books, which he always volunteers, and so—well—we get along. Only, sometimes, I get tired of it all."

There was a slight note of rebellion in her voice and words, and I knew, in a flash, that, creature of the wilderness and the edge of the world as she was, she still had vague longings to pass out into that life whose tales of glamour and unrest had reached her here, more than a thousand miles from the nearest place that could be called civilized.

She turned away from us, calling back an invitation to Dan to come and visit her cabin, and wishing me a mere good-by, and spoke to her father, who obediently rose to his feet and followed her away toward the mouth of the creek, which poured its shallow waters into the Yukon.

We did not speak as we began shoveling in again, hurrying to make up for lost time, and the sun crept across until it was low in the west, lacing the broad river with threads of shifting gold, and permitting the purples of the long Arctic twilight to fasten themselves and grow upon the hills.

It was a familiar, brooding poem to me, this twilight of the North, for I had striven for gold in British Columbia and Alaska for three years, with varying success. Sometimes it had promised largely, and I had dreamed of what greater ventures I should assume when the spring dumps were cleaned, and at other times, hungry, cold, and trail-wearied, I had cursed the white pallor which had beckoned me with pale, illusive fingers, into its heartless depths, to whisper madness into my ears. But now it was summer, and I loved it.

Cassiar had not treated us ill. We had no fortune, but we had enough to move on, and to keep from owing the trader for supplies. We had enough to buy Markam's dump, and I had come down the river, in response to a letter from my partner of three years' time, on a real steamboat, which had churned around bars, perilously threaded the sloughs of the Yukon Flats, and dumped me, the night before, at Neucloviat, the new camp, that, so far, had promised more than it had yielded.

Dan had taken a cabin from another old sourdough we had known at Circle City, and who was going "outside" to pass a winter in a warmer climate—"to thaw out his bones," he said.

"Well, she's dry again." My partner's voice aroused me, and I looked at him where he stood at the head of our little string of sluice boxes, and then climbed up and saw that the stream was running so low and slow that it refused to pass the mud over the riffles. "Guess we'd better knock off. Let's go up and shut down the sluices, so that fool dam will fill up again. No use in tryin' to clean up with what water's left running in from the overflow."

He threw his shovel on the bank, wiped his forehead with the back of his shirt sleeve, and we trudged up the creek beside our little ditch. At the top we noted that the creek was daily running lower, at an almost alarming rate, and discussed this as we retraced our steps and started along the pebbles of the river beach for the camp, which lay almost two miles up the Yukon.

"She looks like business, all right, don't she?" Dan asked, waving his hand toward it as we came closer, after a long, silent tramp, in which each had been occupied with his own thoughts.

I studied the long range of high bank facing the river, which at that point was a full half mile broad. Here and there it rose into high cliffs, cut away into sheer lines by the ferocity of spring ravages of flood and ice. Across from the camp it stretched away into long, gradually ascending slopes, timbered in a heavy green. The camp itself was on a bench full sixty feet above the low-water mark, and, back of that again, the mountains climbed abruptly upward, clad in somber firs, and lightened by patches of silver birch, among which the evening shadows seemed lingering in a soft, hazy good night.

More than two hundred cabins were there, including the straggling row of dance halls, trading posts, "stores," saloons, and "outfitters" which fronted the river as if inviting it to stop and view the grandeur of pioneerdom.

From some of the cabins, which scattered without pretense of street back toward the hills behind, pale wreaths of blue smoke crawled lazily upward, and the ring of an ax as some miner, loafing for the summer, chopped barely wood enough for his evening meal, mingled with the soft cry of the waterfowl speeding here and there in quest of night feeding grounds.

In the strange, vibrant stillness of a summer's night on the arctic circle, all sounds were magnified. The "squawling" of a baby from the native village on the far side of the river, the bawling song of a boatman coming across, the barking of the Malemutes as they tore up and down the shingle beach in front of the native village, and the fierce crescendo of howls and growls when they engaged in a fight; the guttural cries of a squaw as she put an end to the altercation with a club, and drove the combatants, yelping, to the igloos of their owners; a bellow of laughter from the front of one of the rival trading posts where some man told a story that sounded as if meeting with the approval of his auditors.

Somehow, in its wild freedom, it was inspiriting, and I was glad to be alive, to be a part of it, and to forget that winter was coming again inexorably. But as I walked I thought of Elizabeth Wilton, and wondered why she was there; who she was; where she had gathered that cultivated speech; and what brought the sadness and longing to her eyes as she turned them on the man who reiterated the drone of gold that was red as blood!

CHAPTER II.

The lights of the kerosene lamps were dim and low when I strolled into Cavanaugh's that night. He was leaning across his rough wood desk, oilcloth covered, and totaling a column of figures. The lamp above him, the shadows behind, accentuated the whiteness of his hair, until it was rendered a halo of silver. The smell of the trading post was around him, from the damp, pungent odor of seal oil hanging from bladders in his loft, the acrid scent of furs, native cured, the sweet fragrance of sugar, freshly opened, the lower aromas of rice, and the salt smokiness of hams and bacon suspended from the rafters above. The shadows of light, playing across the lurid labels of canned vegetables and meats, and the gaudy prints which the Indians loved, and the strings of beads hanging to the shelf junctures, rendered them all a mellow setting, as they stared, harmonized, from the gloom.

"Hello," he greeted me, lifting his head, and then, "Oh, it's you, is it, Tom Amann? Glad you dropped in. How do you like our camp? Looks like Circle used to two or three years ago, doesn't it?"

He drew away from the desk, and came back to the counter, where he threw his weight across it, leaning on his elbows, as if inviting conversation.

I studied his face as I answered with ordinary, courteous conversation. It was a strange face, full of strange complexities. It had the forehead of the student, and the thoughtful eyes of the student; yet its chin was aggressive, and the mouth clean-cut and decisive. It was that chin which must have brought him to Alaska full thirty years before, when to so venture was to make a greater essay than had been the reckless sailing of Columbus in quest of a new world.

I had heard tales of his past, that told of a fiery youth, of sudden brawls in Pacific coast camps, and of a flight after a fight when his enemy had lain white and still at his feet. Men reiterated that he was an Irish gentleman by birth, and spoke respectfully of his attainments. He was said to have known the shadows of Magdalen College in that glorious seat of learning, Oxford. And yet here he was, white and old, running a trading post that was as isolated as any in the world.

I was so absorbed in listening to his comments that I had almost forgotten my desire to know more of old Bill Wilton until he referred to it himself. It was when I suggested that I was keeping him from his bookkeeping. He laughed at that.

"Well, it really doesn't amount to much," he said, "and can wait. I have a bookkeeper in my clerk, Bessie Wilton; but I must give her a lesson in Greek to-morrow, and so thought I would make it a trifle easier for her."

I sustained a distinct emotion of surprise at his words, and wondered how far his educational efforts with the girl I had seen on the bank had led him. The idea of a girl so advanced in her studies as to be worrying over Greek verbs, in that most isolated spot of the wilderness, was incongruous. He must have read my thought, for again he laughed, with that low, musical, amused note.

"It has been rather a recreation of mine," he said, "ever since she was a mere slip of a girl. She's never had a chance, and she was so bright, that I began it rather as an amusement, kept it up until I found that it was excellent mental training for myself, and, upon my word, she is a wonder!"

His voice betrayed considerable pride in his pupil. He swung his legs over the counter with such ease that his years were belied, and sat on the outer edge by my side.

"It must be something in the primitiveness of her surroundings," he went on, "that makes her so intelligent. Nothing to distract her attention, you know. No fol-de-rols of civilization, no pink teas, pink parties, or pink young men to flirt with. Why, Tom, I believe that pupil of mine could pass with honor almost any university examination that might be put up to her. I know. I've a degree or two myself."

It sounded almost like a boast, this pride in his pupil and his own education. The student was speaking again.

"It seems rather a pity that a man of your attainment should be buried here," I blurted out, and for an instant he frowned and fixed his eyes on me harshly, as if satisfying himself whether or not I was impertinent; then, evidently deciding that my words veiled nothing suggestive, his face relaxed, and he gave something approaching a sigh.

"Perhaps," he replied slowly. "But fate does for us all. Now, there's that girl. If fate had not thrust me into the out-of-the-way places, she might have grown up in the worst ignorance, and an intelligence would have been wasted. She might have reverted. The call of that eighth of Indian blood might have made itself heard, and lured her back to the barabaras."

"Indian blood! An eighth Indian blood!" I exclaimed.

"Oh, I didn't think. I supposed you had heard the family history, and about poor old Bill. 'Red Gold Wilton,' some of the boys call him. Let's see! When you were in Circle, they were up the river with Prevost."

"What about Wilton?" I asked

eagerly. "I saw him to-day, and I was curious about him—about what brought him to that condition."

For a moment Cavanaugh sat quietly, looking out through the door at the growing twilight, and I thought he was not going to gratify my curiosity; then he thrust his hand into the pocket of his mackinaw, pulled out a well-seasoned pipe, filled it with the black "sheepdip" of the North, and lighted it.

"Bill Wilton," he said at last, "has gone through enough to have killed more than one man out of every ten. He was one of the handsomest men I ever saw when I first came into the North. That was thirty years ago. I had found a position with the old Hudson's Bay Company up on the Stewart, when he came there for supplies. I made up an outfit for him, and enjoyed watching him."

Cavanaugh's voice had dropped to a reminiscent vein, and I settled myself to a more comfortable position.

"He stood at least six feet and an inch in his moccasins, had eyes like hot steel, and the grace of a jaguar. By heavens! I saw that man stand flat-footed, and, without any preliminary effort, or raising his hands, jump clear over a counter higher than this, just to stretch his muscles, apparently! His strength was prodigious. He could carry anything he could get on his back. He could outlast any native that ever lived on the trail, and go farther on snowshoes than any one I ever knew. His endurance was incredible. He was a wonderful man, and it was a joy to hear him talk, because he enjoyed living. His voice wasn't like it is now. You've heard him?"

I nodded my head, recalling that cracked, quavering monologue of "Red gold."

"His voice was big and round, and like—like—ever hear the big bell in Moscow? No? Well, it was like that, anyway. One of those voices that you could hear in your mind long after he had finished speaking. I've heard him come singing down the trail nearly a mile away, on a still evening, like this, and you can bet we all used to listen."

Cavanaugh shook his head, and was silent for a moment, as if absorbed in his own memories. I was about to ask him a question, when of his own volition he resumed.

"I don't suppose you ever heard the story; but there is a legend, among the natives, dating back to I don't know how long ago, and certainly known to the old H. B. factors for more than a hundred years, that somewhere, far up in the North, there is a deposit of gold that is enormous. It is red, and the Indian sagas and *tyunes* will shudder when it is mentioned. They say it is accursed. I'm not superstitious; but there may be something in it. I don't know! There are lots of things in this existence, fourth dimension, perhaps, that men, puny and blunt of intelligence, may not comprehend. I'm less assertive and contradictory about those inexplicable manifestations than I used to be, thirty years ago, when I came in here, and believed that anything I couldn't explain, didn't exist!"

I was surprised at this evidence of mysticism, superstition, or whatever it might be classed, coming from his lips; but I held silence, waiting for him to continue.

"Probably Bill Wilton paid small attention to legend, although he must have heard of it," he continued, "until after he married the daughter of old MacCulloch. Mac was the factor of the H. B. post, where I worked when I came in from—well, that doesn't matter. Mac had married a half-breed Cree *klootch*. Daughter of another H. B. factor, upcountry she was, and she might have been handsome when he met her; she wasn't when I got acquainted with her. Gone to fat, a screeching tongue, and he had to keep the post rum under lock and key. But she had a girl that was more Scotch than Cree. I'd have married her myself, if I could have done so, but Bill Wilton, with everything about him to command a woman's affection, got her. I couldn't blame her. He was Wilton the magnificent, with his big laugh, and his big voice, and his big strength.

"You can see what kind of a man he

was when I tell you that on the day she promised to marry him he first went to old Mac, and told him that he was going to marry his daughter, then came directly to me, and put out his hand, and said: 'Sorry for you, Cavanaugh, but it's luck, and you're our best friend. Shake!' That was his way. And I danced at their wedding when the little missionary from Shebalath came up and performed the ceremony, and old MacCulloch broached a keg of brandy that had been in the post for fifty years."

He knocked the ashes from his pipe, and, after rubbing it, with a ruminating attitude, on the tail of his mackinaw, slipped it back into his pocket, crossed one leg over the other, clasped the upraised knee with his hands, and again spoke.

"Bill had a couple of seasons of bad luck working the bars, which was about all the mining that was done in that part of the country at that time, and one day he came into the post, and sat and talked to me for a long time about his plans. He wanted to know if I had ever heard anything about the red gold. I laughed, and told him it was about as reliable a tale as any other that the natives told, and that probably it was about as true as the story of the first fire, and the first boat, and the intervention of the Great Spirit when the seven tribes went to war; but Wilton didn't laugh. I remember yet how he sat there, staring at the light through the crack of one of those big drum stoves, and smoking, and sometimes not winking his eyes for a long time, as if he were absorbed in some dream.

" 'The old woman,' he said, referring to Mac's wife, his mother-in-law, 'has been telling me about it, and I got into a native *kashima* coming down the trail the other night, and heard more of it from an old buck that wanted to be friendly. I believe there is such a ledge, and, Cavanaugh, I'm going to try to find it!'

"You may be sure I tried to talk him out of the notion; but you see the man had lived so long among the natives, had wandered over so many thousand miles of wilderness, was so unafraid, and so down on his luck, that he was ready to believe and to try anything. I don't think old MacCulloch was superstitious when it came to gold; but he, too, tried to dissuade Wilton, who grew more stubborn each day as he made his plans. He left his wife at the post, loaded up his dog sled, and slipped away into the North one brisk December morning, following some idea of his own, gathered probably from what he had gleaned from the native gossip.

"And the Indians? He offered all sorts of inducements to get one to go with him, because no man, no matter how brave he is, likes to pull out that way, alone. It gets on his nerves. But there wasn't an Indian could be induced to go with him for money or promise.

"I shan't forget the morning he left. The sky was cold and dusky, as it always is at that time of the year, when he straightened his dogs out and bade his wife good-by in front of the post. There was one withered old squaw there who looked like a native Witch of Endor, who abandoned her stolidity, shook her skinny, dirty old claws in the air, and told him he was going into the land of the accursed; that the end of his trail would lead him to the devil, and that God Almighty had set His seal on those barrens where the gold was supposed to be waiting, tempting and red.

"Wilton's wife cried a little, and weakened at the last, and clung to him, with her arms around his neck, out there under the cold morning dusk, and begged him to give it up; but he pulled her arms loose, tenderly but determined, and laughed, with that big, reckless, bell-like laugh of his, ran out to the handles of his sled, yelled 'Mush on!' to his leader, and tore away down the river's face, with the frosted snow skirling up behind him in a little cloud. He was a brave figure of a man as he turned, just before taking the bend, waved a good-by to us, and blew a kiss off his mittened fingers at his wife, who was clinging to her father's arm, with tears running like drops of ice down her cheeks.

"It was late in the spring when he came back. He staggered into the post one day, so lean, and thin, and bony,

that one could scarcely recognize him, and fell across the steps of the storeroom where we were working. I ran over and picked him up where he had fallen inside.

"'Grub!' he croaked. 'I'm starving!'

"I got it for him, and ran across to tell his wife and old Mac that he was home again. It took him at least ten days to recover, he was so far gone. He had traveled so far that he had lost count of distances, and when his supplies ran out, ate his dogs, one at a time—ate his mukluks, boiled his fur parka, tried to eat the leather of his pack straps! And there was nothing but the iron nerve, and the iron body of Bill Wilton that brought him back alive.

"All the summer long he worked the bars and got poor pay. His strength came back, and once in a while he laughed; but he was not the same Bill Wilton. He worshiped his wife, and when she was around appeared to have a sort of content; but when she left him he would sit and brood, and there was a light in his eyes that wasn't nice to see; a something of a shadow, as if he had seen something, or his sufferings on that trip had branded his soul with a red iron—red as the gold he sought.

"In the second winter he was restless, and would have gone again, I believe, had it not been for the protestations and pleadings of his wife, who was none too well. And another summer went by, and his moodiness and nervousness grew. He wasn't the cool, laughing Bill Wilton any more. He was a man maddened by a dream. And the dream was not for himself, but for what he might do if he found that ledge, and laid its riches at his wife's feet. I credit him with that. He was a fool! He thought that it took gold to make her happy, and her happiness was his greatest ambition. You see, it had got on his mind, with its curse.

"December came again, and he had nothing to do. Mac wanted him to work for the H. B., but he had an idea that his going to work would mean my discharge, and perhaps he was right. I never quite knew, save that I fancy old Mac would have let me go as coolly as if I were a condemned dog if it served his own aims. I wish I had reasoned it out sooner, and quit. I would have lived with the natives in an igloo to have saved either Bill Wilton or his wife what followed. Yes, I'd have walked into the storeroom, stripped a boot, and found the trigger of a rifle with my toe, to have saved her the suffering that came. For Bill Wilton grew more restless day by day, and went! This time she nearly fell to her knees on the snow, in a sort of hysterical agony, to restrain him. She sobbed, and patted his cheek, and clung to him, until he almost tore himself loose from her hands, and ran away after his yelping dogs as if the devil were driving him on, and without looking back.

"Her father and I picked her up, and old Mac cursed his strange Scottish oaths, and told her not to make a fool of herself, and almost dragged her into the house. That is another day I shan't forget!

"In eight months after the dogs tore away over the snow, Bill Wilton was a father, and a widower! And on that dreadful night the withered old crone squatted on the doorstep of the pelt house, and rocked to and fro, and muttered: 'Gold! Devil's gold! Red gold! The white man's curse is come,' until I drove her away. I was half mad myself. It was horrible! I had heard those agonized cries in the night, sounding through log walls, hour after hour, with no doctor within five hundred miles, and her life going out! Going out when it might have been saved, if any one had known how. And thus was Bessie born, off up there on a winter night when the stars seemed near and listening."

Cavanaugh's voice had dropped until it was scarcely audible. He seemed to be talking to himself, rather than to me, and for a long time he sat there, with his head drooped forward on his breast, and his hands hanging listless and inert by his sides. I respected the sorrow that I knew bridged in the unspoken sentences when he spoke of that woman whom he had loved, and who had so

painfully parted soul and body on that far-gone night. His voice was dead level and old when he again took up his narrative, and he did not look at me, but rather into the shadows of the room, as if seeing ghosts of his youth.

"Wilton did not return. A native brought a letter which had been passed from hand to hand, running around by the way of Point Barrow on the northern coast of Alaska to St. Michels, then up the Yukon, by slow stages, and, as if in travesty, it was addressed in its worn handwriting to his wife! To the wife that had been dead almost six months when it came. Old Mac and I tore it open, and read it together, one night in the trading post. He had suffered God only knows what, but was now fighting against fate. He had wandered, and starved, and been rescued by some hunting natives when almost dead, taken to Point Barrow, got another outfit from the whalers after he had recovered his strength, and was going back. He said he thought he knew where it was, the red gold. And that he would either die or get it."

He suddenly leaned toward me, frowning through the gloom, and held me with his eyes and the suggestion of awe in his voice.

"Do you know what happened? That post had a barricade around the buildings. The gates had been locked that night, because some of the natives had taken to pilfering. It was almost midnight when we opened that letter and read it, and yet, when we had finished, the door opened, and into the room came that old squaw witch, with the frost falling around her in a shower as the warm air fought the draft of cold from without, and raised her hands! It is true!

"Clairvoyance you may call it, or something else. I don't know. I've never told this before to any living man, because most of them wouldn't understand, or would think me a liar; but I tell it to you because I believe you are ready to listen to some things that one doesn't often mention. She was there in the doorway. How she got in, or over the stockade, I don't know. But she was there! She stood for a full half minute, and although I'm not superstitious, I felt the hair raise on my head. Old Mac sort of stood, with the letter in his hands, as if paralyzed, and he scowled at her with his hard, weather-beaten Scotch face.

" 'And he says he'll get it or die!' she croaked in her native tongue, which was as clear to us as our own. 'And he shall die! Not with the body, but with the mind! He will find it, and it is cursed. It shall be red, like blood, and it will burn his heart to a red ash.'

"Old Mac made a rush for her, white, cursing, and distraught. She spat at him venomously, held her hands up to ward him off with a dignity that made him cower back, and then the door shut with a bang, and she was gone. For a half minute we stood there looking at each other, and then, together, ran to the door, and pulled it open. The moon was in the full, and shone so bright, and cold, and white, that every building stood out.

"But the stockade was empty! The gates were shut, and we ran out to them to find them locked. I tore a key from my pocket, and my fingers shook as I sprang the lock. We ran outside. There was nothing in sight save the unbroken snow. We ran round the stockade to see where she had gone. She had disappeared as if she had been a spirit, and I was glad to return and lock the gates.

"It got on my nerves. Mac, I think, was a little affected, also, for I saw that his fingers were not steady when he unlocked the old strong box in the corner of the post, and laid Bill Wilton's letter away with the other papers in the final drawer.

"The next day I asked a native, who came in, where the old crone was. 'Gone,' he answered. 'Been gone three months. Down river, maybe. Maybe dead.'

"I don't know about that, either. Perhaps he lied. Perhaps it was the truth, and what we saw was something else! Some spirit of the night. Some hallucination. But we saw it, MacCulloch and I. That I swear.

"And we forgot about it, as men will

forget, when the months went on, and we heard nothing more from Bill Wilton. Then one evening, in December again, two years after he had run down the trail after his dogs as if driven by the devil himself, a sled came jingling up to the door, and I saw the dogs come round the corner of the post. They were strange dogs, trail worn, and the sled they dragged was different from the upcountry sleds. It was a coast sled, such as the Inuits use, out on the Bering coast, more than a thousand miles away.

"Behind them ran a man whose stature was such that I gave an exclamation, and hurried to open the door. It opened before I could reach it, and inside he stepped, ice-bearded, and shouting a boisterous welcome. Bill Wilton had returned.

"'It's me, Cavanaugh,' he called, and then he suddenly stopped and said: 'What's the matter, man? What ails you? I'm no ghost!'

"I suppose something in the way I was standing there warned him. I suppose the knowledge of the blow I must deliver was mirrored in my attitude. His hands, which had evidently been badly frosted, and were heavily bandaged, fell to his sides, and he leaned his head forward, and stared at me. The sounds of his team, outside, and the voice of a native, guttural, harsh, and tired, driving away the dogs of the post, came faintly through the door. The old H. B. clock, ticking on the wall, had become a hammer beating a steel gong remorselessly.

"'My wife?' he whispered, and his voice had the soft sharpness of death itself whispering in a listening ear. 'My wife! Where is she? I thought I might find her here, waiting! Is she in the cabin?'

"I stood there for a long time, and then shook my head. I hated to give him his deathblow, and I was so surprised by his arrival, by his unexpected appearance, there in flesh and vigor, that I could not find words. Something must have told him. He backed, step by step, tottering, until the logs of the wall stopped him, and his poor, bandaged hands went out until they rested wide behind him.

"'Dead! She's dead!' he said, and Heaven knows I hope never again to hear that profound agony in a human voice.

"I nodded acquiescence dully. Then suddenly he tore the bandages from his festering fingers where the skin had been killed by the icy cold of December, and lifted his maimed hands high up, and shook them at the blackened rafters above. I shuddered when I heard him curse life, Omnipotence, and high Heaven itself. He was a living fury, venting his bravery on fate, and challenging the thunderbolts to blot out his life.

"He begged God to grant him death, and then abruptly reached up those grasping, hideous, bleeding fingers, and, with one fierce, tearing clutch, tore his parka, mackinaw, and shirt wide, and dragged out a buckskin bag, sweat-stained. His fingers did not pause to untie it, but with maniacal strength appeared to rip the bag open, and with one sweeping throw of his arm he sent it and its contents out and over the floor.

"He had burst into cynical, bitter laughter, and now suddenly collapsed down the wall, a broken, wilted wreck of a mighty man, sobbing aloud with great, heart-rending moans. And I, starting toward him, saw what he had thrown. The floor was littered with little nuggets of gold! And they glowed dully, malevolently! For they were red! Red as blood wrung from a tortured heart!"

CHAPTER III.

Cavanaugh had arisen to his feet, and, after a broad gesture with his hands, held them extended, as if seeing there, before him, on the rough floor of that older trading post far away, globules of gold, accursed. In the gloom of the post his eyes blazed and stared, and the muscles of his neck seemed tensed and drawn. He appeared to recover himself, gave a foolish, mirthless little laugh, and began pacing up and down the room, with slow, aimless footsteps. I shuddered a little, for the spell of his story was still on me, and thought

of the wreck of a good man, Bill Wilton, whose reason had been unbalanced by privation and a succession of blows, incomprehensible and deadly.

My memory appeared to find new details in his attitude as I saw him sitting on the bank, with the pebbles falling through his maimed fingers, the fingers that had cast away all that he had found. Vivid and clear, he stood before me there in the H. B. log post, stricken to the heart, and perhaps remorsefully believing that had he not made the great quest, his wife might have survived.

"So, you see, it had a foundation in truth!"

Cavanaugh had halted in front of me, and was again undisturbed.

"He had found a deposit of red gold. He had lived to bring some of it back, as tangible evidence of its existence. He had traveled over hundreds of miles, buoyed up by hope and the belief that he was to throw in his wife's lap the *magnum opus* of man's striving, wealth —wealth to buy ease, comfort, and travel, time to gain knowledge, means to make a home somewhere in a less inhospitable clime. And she was not there to greet him, or to forgive him the feverishness of his rude, half-mad departure.

"I left him huddled there against the foot of the wall, still moaning, and ran across to bring MacCulloch, telling him in broken, breathless sentences that Bill Wilton's reason was ebbing, that it was at stake, and that something must be done for him. Mac snatched the baby from its rough, homemade crib, and we ran back and into the post.

"Mac shouted to Wilton, who looked up, and slowly got to his feet, where he stood, wavering, and his fingers worked, shutting and unshutting, and his lips twitched, and his eyes were blank and filmed, as if Death were invading him. Mac held the baby, Bessie, toward him; and she, recovering from the shock of her awakening from sleep, suddenly held her hands out toward her father, and smiled and gurgled with her sweet little voice.

"For an instant we thought the man was affrighted. He cowered back still farther, and then, as if we were wolves, and he feared for our hold of the baby, he seized her feverishly in his arms, and walked up and down the post. We hoped to see him break—hoped that the tears would swim in those fierce, glittering, dry eyes; but none came.

"He began to quaver in a far-away voice, as if detached from him, and bearing no relation to the big bell booms of sound that used to bubble from him in the old days, an Indian song from the southern coast. You know it, that coarse chant of

"Konwusky nouka.
Tinki omlatuch!
Tinki omlatuch.
Konwusky nouka!

"The song of money in plenty, ask where!"

I nodded my head, and Cavanaugh walked slowly down to the end of the room, around some of the piles of merchandise that were heaped, dim and misshapen, in the lower end, and back up behind the counter, where he leaned against a string of beads that clashed and rattled. The light above shone more fully on his face, and it seemed to me to have become more sad in its lines.

"That's about all there is to it," he said, as if his tale were finished. "We never quite understood, for a long time, whether he realized that he was Bessie's father; but he used to growl like a beast if any one attempted to take her away from him, or to care for her. He used to sleep with her in his arms, and one night, when I had worked late on the monthly reports, and come into the big living cabin, and passed his door, it was open, and he was there beside her, resting on his elbows, and staring down into her face, as if trying to solve that puzzling problem of existence. In the summer he would carry her, for hours, in his arms. For two or three years he scarcely spoke to any of us, then he began to work a little, doing chores around the post.

"Only once a sign of the old feverishness came over him in full force. That was after I had left the post, and was working a patch of poor placer ground

up above. But I happened to be there. He had been restless for days, and on this afternoon came out into the open, with a huge pack before him, which he laid down, as if thinking of something forgotten. I tried to find out where he thought he was going, and all he did was to mutter that incoherent gibberish about red gold—red as blood.

"I didn't want to hurt him, and I knew that an attempt to overpower a man of such prodigious strength as was his, and especially as it might prove when fanned by madness, meant that I might have to wound him. So I ran back up past the post, and called for Bessie. She came toddling toward me, and I picked her up in my arms, and ran almost blindly, in haste, back to where I had seen her father.

" 'You must put your arms around his neck and say, "Stay with Bessie. Don't go!" ' I kept telling her, and she learned her little lesson. It worked. Bill Wilton rubbed his hands across his eyes, bewildered, as if the words had recalled something of his past, some other day, when he had been asked to stay, and had refused. I don't think he could grasp that intangible memory; but he suddenly cried—and Heaven knows it is pitiful to hear a strong man cry—carried his pack back inside the cabin, and was docile again."

I sat for a time thinking of the tragedy of the mind, and was prompted to ask of the trader, still leaning against the partitions, and staring off into space: "Did he have much of the gold—the red gold?"

"Yes, a fair sum—such as a man might escape with after such hardship. About three thousand dollar's worth, I suppose. I have an idea that he tried to carry away more, but dropped it, little by little, as his strength failed in his flight to save his life. MacCulloch and I swept up about a hundred and forty ounces of it, and sent it away. We took the money and brought the best alienist from out in the States that our money would command, that he might say what was best to be done with Bill."

"And what did he say?" I asked, filled with pity.

"That it was no earthly use for us to send him to a sanitarium or asylum, and that none but God Himself could restore the mind of Bill Wilton. He thought it might come by accident, but even that hope has died as the years have advanced; for he is now about sixty years of age, and the brain cells at his time of life are almost indurated."

Cavanaugh stopped speaking, shifted on his feet, and then walked around the counter again, and looked out into the long twilight of the night. Then, as if satisfied that we were still safe from intrusion, leaped over the rough pine boards, polished by contact only to a lumpy smoothness, and stooped over his safe.

"I'll show you something," he said, standing erect. "But I don't want you to mention it to any one. Sleeping dogs must be left to sleep. Look at this."

He fumbled through the contents of the drawer he had removed from the safe, and I saw a priceless gem tossed carelessly to one side, a bow of faded ribbon, a coin cut in half, a miniature in a yellow frame, and then, with an exclamation—"Here it is!"—he picked up a small wad of paper. He unrolled it carefully, and held something in the palm of his hand. It was a single nugget of gold, not heavily washed, for its edges were still sharp in places, and it glowed a dull and somber red.

"That's one of them," he said sententiously. "I have never seen anything like it. Have you?"

I did not answer. I was interested in its curious color. It was as if it had been permeated with blood. Iron oxydization, perhaps, for such deposits have been found, though rarely. I recalled that down in Eldorado County, California, there was one small place where miners of the olden days tossed nuggets out of the sluice boxes because they were coated with red, to afterward learn that they had thrown away gold impregnated with iron in oxydization. But I had never seen that gold.

Perhaps this might be the same. I was not certain. And for some reason, it seemed to me that the nugget was evil, and that it burned the palm of my hand,

and fascinated me, and was sentient. I gave it back, and caught myself furtively wiping my hand on my trousers leg, as if it had been stained by contact with that symbol of tragedy. It was as if there were truth in the Indian legend that it was accursed, and that it brought grief to all who came in contact with it.

Quite as carefully as he had removed it, the trader replaced it. His voice came to me as he knelt down, and locked the inner compartment of the safe.

"MacCulloch handled some of it. It set him to brooding over the heavy blow dealt his family. He neglected his business, and left it to a young fellow sent out from the head offices. When that boy was shot by one of the Northwest Mounted Police, who found him in his own home with a wife betrayed, the boy's defalcations came to light. It cost old Mac every dollar he had saved, for the H. B. is unbending. His half-breed wife went out one night with heart disease, and Mac, poor old chap, was drowned trying to save a crippled dog."

Cavanaugh suddenly stood up, and blew out the light above—his face appearing old and distressed as its rays shone on him, standing tiptoe, to extinguish its flame. I knew that he was dismissing me, and walked slowly outside, and stood by the door. His movements were subdued until he stood beside me, and turned and fumbled with the big iron key that locked his fortress. The camp was still, and the air was still, with the long, hazy, gentle stillness of a summer's night in the Northland.

For a time we stood there, and looked at the river winding below us toward the buttresses of the Ramparts, and it seemed to me that the water was smoothing itself for that swift rush through the rock-bordered channel. I was filled with a strange love of the country which could be so hospitable in its lazy summer mood, and such a fierce, rigid contestant in its winter solstice. The voice of old Cavanaugh aroused me:

"Pretty, isn't it? Does it hold you, entice you, enthral you, as it does me?"

I told him that it did, and for another minute he stood and looked around him, and drew deep inhalations, as if clearing his lungs of the mingled odors emanating from the storehouse where he passed his days. Evidently he was in no mood for further words, for he bade me a curt "Good night," and turned away toward the cabin, which huddled in the rear of the big log structure over which he presided. He suddenly turned and called to me:

"Oh, Amann! Amann! Just a minute."

I had started along the trail leading past the river-fronting row, but halted. He came toward me with his long, sturdy step, and laid a hand on my arm.

"Don't forget to say nothing about the nugget," he cautioned. "Men believe it a mere childish legend, and that Bill Wilton never found anything to prove it otherwise. Don't be so reckless as to start a stampede to unknown places, even if there is nothing in—well—in the native superstition. It is best that men, especially these tenderfeet, continue to believe it a myth."

I agreed with him, and gave my word, even as I gave my hand in good night. He turned and walked away, and I resumed my march to the cabin where my partner, honest and tired, doubtless slept the sleep of the hard-worked.

Here and there along the row the lights still flared. From the Honolulu came the steady click of the white ball chasing itself languidly across the brass partitions of the roulette wheel, and I heard the bang of a case as a faro deal was finished, and the casekeeper flipped his little buttons back for a fresh start. Farther down the line a woman's voice, drink-coarsened, attempted a song, and the remnant of her contralto broke dolefully when she came to the changes in her meager register. A door of a cabin on the hillside opened and shut, and a man with a pack on his back plunged out, and started into the trail leading off toward the diggings, which lay three miles back of the river camp, his frying pan and coffee pot clanking as he went.

I halted when I came to the front of our cabin. My four dogs barked me a

greeting, and Malicula, my big gray leader, jumped up and put his paws on my shoulder for a caress. The cabin door was open, as if my partner scorned its frail barrier against any one who cared to invade it. I started to enter, and then had a sudden disinclination for sleep. The story of the red gold was still overpowering my fatigue, and I turned down and loitered along the river bank, passing slowly, farther and farther, until I was near the place where the Marook came brawling across its shallows to empty its limpid waters into the yellow current of the Yukon. The light was turning again from a heavy dusk, somnolent and soporific to the paler gold of an arctic dawn—and there is nothing in the world more beautiful.

From up the river I saw something shaping itself upon its breast. It forged ahead, and I saw that it was a boatman in a native canoe. The paddle rose and fell with steady, dignified deliberation. Evidently the man was in no haste, and was not familiar with his landing place. He was almost abreast of me, when he appeared to evince curiosity as to who I was. He swung his paddle vigorously on the far side, and the canoe's nose, supple, turned toward me, and halted almost when the pebbles of the beach threatened to rend its lower hull.

A native of splendid stature leaped out, his mukluks splashing the water, and with paddle retained in one hand, with the other he caught his craft by its upturned nose, and held it secure. His denim parka, of a common cut, whose resemblance to a short shirt I had long ceased to be interested in, was without trimming, and open at the throat, and hoodless. His pillarlike legs, standing firmly, were surrounded by the waters which rippled and fought against them in little swirls.

His face was turned toward me, and I saw that the nose was high and strong, that the eyes were sharp and inquiring in their somber depths, and that his cheek bones were rounded rather than abrupt. His hair had been shorn away until it fell in an even line at the base of his neck, and he was bareheaded, with a parting line distinctly outlined up to the crown of his head. There was something aggressive about him, some primitive dignity different from the ordinary pose of the arctic native.

"Neucloviat?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Good!"

He stepped back into his canoe, and, with one heavy, deft stroke, sent it clear of the shore, and, without looking back at me, began paddling diagonally across the river. I knew that he was heading for the Indian village on the opposite bank, and smiled when I thought of his sparse conversation; but there was something about him that caused me to be more thoughtful, to treat our interview as of more importance. It was as if he were a force commanding something from me, and from that primitive country of which he was a part.

And as he disappeared I went back to our cabin, to drop to sleep, exhausted, in my bunk, and to dream of tragedies, nameless and overpowering, in all of which there gleamed the ruddy nuggets.

CHAPTER IV.

It comes back to me now, as if it all occurred in a flash, the happenings of Neucloviat; and yet summer waned, the brief fall came, and winter was on us before they were complete, and I felt myself an integral part of the new camp hanging there on the river's brim. I see the forgotten faces, I laugh over the humorous lights, I frown at the somber ones.

The taciturn Indian, Pitkok, seems always present in those months, as he stalked gigantic and sullen across the scene. Sam Barstow is there, taciturn also, unlucky, dangerous, and credited with being an honest wolf, if such an anomaly may be. I see the iron gray of his hair, the conquering nose, the sweeping mustache, the hard eyes, and the lithe, nervous swing of his shoulders. Spider Riggs, the gambler, suave, rapacious, crafty, and insolent, a camp Lothario who prided himself on escapades which add to a blackguard's reputation for conquest. Marie Devinne, of doubtful ancestry, vivacious, French

Canadian, and silly, flitting as a cheerful butterfly across the days, dancing as a cheerful will-o'-the-wisp at nights, elusive, fickle, and tempestuous. And, most important, but not lost to life or association, the irrepressible Kentucky Smith, boyish, reckless, and handsome, with a laugh that won hearts, a smile that conquered, and a fearlessness that commanded respect.

"That's Pitkok," Dan said to me on the day after I saw the arrival of the native *voyageur*, pointing a grimy finger at the Indian. "The devil's in that Siwash. They say he's a Koyukuk, and that he's got the trail fever. Looks like it to me. I saw him down at Juneau one fall, when I was on the Treadwell. Then he was at Cassiar before you came there. I reckon that was where he learned the two wickedest things in the world—what gold is worth, and how *hutch* makes you feel if you can get enough of it. He gambles with the other bucks, and a sealer told me he hunted with a schooner one year, and gambled away all his wages. Windy Jim says he met him one season down in the hop fields of Oregon, and Billy Blatchford says the Kings Islanders know and hate him. So he's sure traveled some!"

"But what brings him here?" I wondered, taking another look at the man I had seen land.

"Because he can't go back to his own tribe!" chuckled my partner. "He knows too much and—well—he's a bad egg. He's up to something, you can be sure."

I forgot that conversation as the weeks passed, until the night when Bessie Wilton brought Pitkok back to my mind. I had got into the habit of visiting her cabin every night, and looking forward to the evening through every day's work. We had arrived at terms of warm friendship, at least, and so were sometimes confidential.

"That Pitkok was in at the post today," she said, one evening, "and he was just as ugly as ever. He was right angry with me because I wouldn't trust him for an oufit, and was angrier still with Uncle Cav because he wouldn't let him have about a year's supplies. Uncle Cav almost put him out; but he is a dear, and scarcely ever loses his temper, so it all passed over, like a summer thunder shower."

I don't know why it was that a piece of gossip so trivial impressed itself on me, but it did, and afterward I had better cause to remember it. I sat thinking of it when Bess rallied me on my silence, and demanded that I tell her what studies were pursued by young ladies who passed through Wellesley, or Bryn Mawr.

"Not that I've any idea of going, for a while," she said, laughing. "It takes money, in the first place; and, in the second, I don't think father would like it."

Her voice broke with a little, pathetic laugh, which hurt, and she looked out into the other room, where Bill Wilton was laboriously adding another patch to his summer parka.

"Yes," she sighed, as if answering my curious question at his needlework, "that is one of his peculiarities. He will neither permit me to do his sewing, nor to buy new clothing for him. When he wants anything he appears down at the post, refuses to do business with me, and buys from Uncle Cav, assuring him that sooner or later he is going to pay his bill, as soon as he feels well enough to go prospecting again."

I wanted to change the subject, for I knew that it was a constant wound to her, a constant sorrow.

"But about some college?" I said. "Is it so hopeless that you can never go to one? It doesn't require so much money, in these days."

Her face brightened, and she laughed tolerantly.

"I don't know why I should give you any confidence," she replied, "but, on the other hand, I don't know why I shouldn't. I don't even know how much money I have. And I can't find out. I asked Uncle Cav once, as he stands like a guardian—almost like a father—to me, and he said for me not to bother my head about it. He explains that there is just income enough so that all the bills are always being paid, and that

I owe nothing, and once in a while he insists that if I need any more money than I am getting, he can arrange to get it from the estate, whatever it is."

Her face took on that all-too-frequent reflection of sorrow as she paused for a moment, and said softly, as if fearing the sound might be audible to the ears of her father:

"You see, it can't amount to very much, for it is simply an investment of the gold father brought back on that last expedition, and he couldn't have carried much, from all that can be learned of that trip. I know from what he has said at times that he was starving when he was rescued, and that the triplet peaks, as he always calls them, lay far behind."

I nodded my head, and fell to silence again, a mood which she seemed to share, for she, too, sat staring vacantly at her open books. I was filled with a sudden increase of admiration for Cavanaugh, the trader. I understood at once, from her words, that he had lied to her like a gentleman through all the years of her life, and kept from her the knowledge that both she and her father were absolutely dependent on him for every dollar they had ever had since that unfortunate end to the quest for gold. He had preserved for her, delicately, her independence, even while he educated her, and directed her mind, and, as a last thoughtfulness, had found work for her in his trading post, so that she might have no time to brood.

I comprehended more fully that the white-headed gentleman of the wilderness was no ordinary man, and mentally I blessed him. I wondered then, and have often done so since, at the great love he must have sustained for the girl's mother; but that was, and is, a closed chapter; for Cavanaugh, faithful, never referred to it further than the suggestion conveyed when he told me that night in the post that he loved the daughter of old MacCulloch.

"There was an ole nigger an' his name was
Uncle Ned,
An' he died long, long ago-o-o."

A careless, singing voice, musical and happy, floated through the closed door, followed by the clumping of boots over the frozen hummocks of the trail, and Bessie lifted her head and smiled.

"There comes Kentucky," she exclaimed, and rose to her feet, and hurried to open the door—too eagerly, I thought; for the irrepressible Kentucky Smith was too popular with her to suit my own ideas.

"Shrieking as usual!" she laughed.

And I heard his hearty: "Sure! Why not, honey? It makes folks know you're happy."

"But the song is doleful," she retorted. "For instance, the line about taking pills through his nose, and his inability to masticate hoe cake because he was *sans* teeth."

He came stamping into the outer room of the cabin, gave the patient old Wilton a slap on the back and a kindly greeting, and then stood in the doorway looking at me.

"Hello, Tom!" he said heartily. "You here again. Say, man, I'm gettin' jealous of you-all. I sure am! If I don't look out this Miss Bessie will be falling head over——"

She brushed past him, and put her hand on his lips, and he tore them away to vent his fine, free laugh, then came forward and put his hand out to me. There was a splendid exuberance about him, a splendid youth, that was compelling. He was lithe and well set, his movements were graceful, and his face was winning. He had fine brown eyes, and heavy brown hair that, when "mussed up," as he called it, never appeared less becoming to the well-rounded forehead and good brow.

I had come to regard him with a certain jealousy, and yet I liked him. My own inability to hold light conversation, my own seriousness, I knew, made me anything but a pleasant chance companion, and the foolish little name bestowed upon me by Miss Wilton in the first weeks of our acquaintance, "Old Mister Sobersides," I felt bitterly was well merited.

"Everything's goin' to the bad in this camp," he said dolefully, as he dropped into one of the rough chairs, comfortably blanketed with a white bearskin.

"Old Cavanaugh had to bust in at the Horn Spoon, and spoil what promised to be a lovely fight. Sam Barstow was about to lam some fellow from Dawson for dancin' too many times with Marie Devinne! Ha, ha, ha!"

He threw his head back, and laughed with loud enjoyment.

"That little Marie certainly leads Sam something of a hurdle race, all right. She knows that Sam's crazy about her, and I reckon she thinks a heap of him, right down in her silly little insides; so she leads Sam up to the fool trough every once in a while, and then laughs when he drinks."

"Care for Sam? Her? Pshaw!" Bessie exclaimed. "What big fools men can be! That girl is the silliest, most heartless, frivolous girl in any dance hall in the North. Didn't she stick to Panamint Jones, up at Circle City, only as long as his money lasted? Didn't she promise that Norwegian to marry him after he came down from Stewart River, and every one thought he had made a strike, and then, when it proved worthless, drop him as if he were hot iron?"

Kentucky laughed tolerantly.

"But my-oh, how she can dance!" he exclaimed enthusiastically, as if to arouse Bessie to further argument. "Lordee! I certainly do love to waltz with that girl."

"Humph!" was all the answer he got, and she turned to me, and began addressing all her conversation in my direction, as if purposely ignoring the enthusiasms of the Kentuckian, who winked at me gravely, and in pauses of the conversation continued to deliver a panegyric on the dance-hall girl.

She finally drove us away, with the assertion that she had to study the books given her by Cavanaugh, and at the door somewhat pointedly gave me a warm invitation to come up any evening when I chose, and again ignored Kentucky, who stood shaking with suppressed laughter by my side.

"You-all don't need to invite me," he said. "I'll come anyhow, unless you lock your doors. I'm certainly too much in love with this family to——"

The door banged shut, and he doubled over hilariously, and then said: "Wow! That ends my sweet discourse for this evenin', bretheren!" and led the way down the hillside. The lights were beginning to flame in the north, and the crisp air of the early fall season was around us as we walked down toward the squat cabins below us, resting like distorted shapes, asleep, under the stars.

"I like to get a rise out of her," he said, after we had stumbled halfway down the hill. "But she's right. That Marie Devinne is a little devil. And she'll make Sam Barstow look like a sucker yet, before she's through with him. Poor cuss! That feller's got too many dark horses runnin' in his head, to stand for too much. He's a simple sort, but I've noticed that when his kind go, they go hard. Either mighty bad, or mighty good. I'm right shy of him, myself, and yet they say he's on the level."

He had almost voiced my own thoughts, and I was still thinking of his careless summary, when we turned into the Horn Spoon, to see what it held of interest. It was smoke-filled, and man-filled. The bar in front was doing its full share of business, and the glasses, piled in front of the American flag and the mirror, which had done more than its share of service on some cheap dresser top, were diminished in number.

The bartender, wearing a white hat and blue glasses to shade his eyes, was steadily twisting the *hutch* bottle backward and forward, and his arms were wet up to the point where his blue flannel shirt sleeves were rolled below his elbows. His long, black necktie had become untied, and was trailing forlorn ends downward until he could find time to adjust them.

Back on the left-hand side of the room two faro layouts and a wheel were also liberally patronized, and in front of one of the faro tables Marie Devinne, with her white hat, dented, and banded by a red ribbon, was keeping the cases. Big Jim, a familiar character, with a crude eyeshade pulled over his forehead to protect his eyes from the glare of the smoke-clouded oil lamps above, was dealing, and Frank Smith, calm and

unmoved, sat in the "lookout" chair, smoking and watching the play to arbitrate errors.

Behind Marie, and leaning across her, to place his bets as his fancy dictated, towered Sam Barstow, black-faced, and evidently playing in poor luck. Apparently the unpleasantness of the evening had passed away.

At the other table sat Spider Riggs, chalk-faced, furtive, immaculate; and watching the game were camp friends of mine—Sturgis, and Coen, and Atkins, Hopkins, Beaton, and Buckingham, Welch, and Crowley, and McCabe. Where are you all now?

And back in the far corner, leaning against the logs, and with folded arms, as if watching the whole scene disdainfully, stood Pitkok, the Indian, with his bright eyes flashing here and there, a picture of devilment and jealousy. I was caught by his attitude and scowl. The man envied these white trespassers for their cloak of masterfulness, and yet hated them all.

A guitar, a mandolin, and a flute, took up a dismal attempt at the Zenda waltzes, the sound coming in a jumble from the other far corner of the room, and the four women in the place suddenly got to their feet, and accepted proffered partners, and went whirling around the room in the cleared space reserved for dancing.

The games went on monotonously, the click of the ball on the wheel rising to a sharp clatter, and then dying away to slow, diminishing, and individual thuds. The chips clicked as they changed hands, symbols of changing money, and the smoke continued to rise and cloud the lamps as it wreathed itself spirally upward through the chimney openings of the bright tin reflectors. The clink of glasses and bottles thrown deftly along the bar continued unceasingly, and the only punctuations were the muttered exclamations of the losers or winners, and the rising voices of some of those who had imbibed.

Familiar as it all was, I had a sudden premonition that underneath all its recklessness there was an undernote of tragedy—a tragedy of the Northland, that was to involve me in its diapason when it came.

CHAPTER V.

Winter seized us. My partner and I worked the claim we had bought on Little Marook, and yet, three times a week, I made the long trip to the camp; for the greatest ambition I had conceived, the greatest hope in life, lay in having Elizabeth Wilton tell me that she loved me. Thirty years of age, matured, unscarred, I had been drawn into the vortex of love, where everything but the ultimate is lost sight of, and paltry. Three times a week I made that long trip over the trail, that I might hear her voice, and watch the shadows in her hair, the light in her eyes, and the graceful mobility of her lips.

And many events had happened, trivial in themselves, but distinct and of note to one living in a camp so far removed from the outside world that letters came but once a year, and everything was bounded by what could be seen on the horizon, and the day's work.

Early in the fall the constant companionship of Sam Barstow and Pitkok had been observed, and commented on. It was an unusual thing for a white man to take up with a native in those days.

"I tell you," Dan was wont to assert, "there's somethin' back of it all that we ain't on to. That Pitkok's a devil! I know him. Sam was all right, as far as anybody knows, until he came down the river. He works, and he wants to get ahead. But what does he mix up with that big buck for? Why, the Koyukuks won't have nothin' to do with him, and when an Injun's own tribe throws him out, there's somethin' mighty bad about him. You just wait! You'll see!"

But the strange companionship had continued, and it had ended by their going away together one night, in which direction no one knew—not even the natives of the low-lying village across the river. That they went together I knew from something that Bessie told me on one of my visits.

"Sam Barstow has gone away with Pitkok," she said, as if she, too, had noted the strange partnership. "You remember I told you, one time, oh, months ago, that he came into the post, and wanted credit for a big outfit? Well, it was right after that he and Sam began to be seen together. Now, it was Sam over in the Indian village, and again it was Pitkok living in Sam's cabin. Finally Sam came in and bought supplies, and Pitkok was with him. They stood there together, and discussed what they wanted, and it was light stuff, such as men would use on a long, hard trip. And they went away together, and—well, that's all there is to it. I wonder what that dance girl, Marie, thinks of it!"

She had ended her information in a feminine way, by a feminine speculation as to the member of her sex left behind.

In the usual meeting places, the trading posts, the saloons, and the dance halls, men had smiled, and ventured that Sam had gone away on a foolish prospecting trip, such as had been made by a half dozen men in search of "Too-much-gold Creek," a mythical stream in the Mackenzie border told of by the natives, but never found.

Men worked more, gambled less, and played infrequently now that the busy season was on in force, and the fires from the pits shone dully on every gulch, every night. The ring of the ax, the creak of the windlass, and the clashing of overturned buckets, formed a threnody too irresistible to be displaced by idle wonder as to the goings and comings of one man. Life was palpitating, and wriggling, as if the loss of any camp character were unworthy of note. It followed its course.

Kentucky Smith, swinging down the trail and whistling, as he passed from his claim above ours, Bevins sauntering over to our cabin in the evenings to tell us that the pay on Number Twelve looked better, Sinclair stopping on his way up to give us camp news, were the only breaks in the steady grind of work, fed by hope.

And it was Sinclair who, on the way up, one night in early January, paused to tell us that Sam Barstow was back. That was all, he had returned.

"And Pitkok?" asked Dan, who stood on the edge of the dump, looking down to the blackened path leading past it, on which our fellow prospector had halted.

"Pitkok's dead!" was the reply.

We gave exclamations of surprise.

"Sam says he got scratched up by a bear as they were coming out," Sinclair went on. "Sam got there too late. Pitkok cashed in his chips, in spite of all that Sam could do. And it's a small loss, according to my reckoning. That buck gave me the willies. He was too much of here, there, and everywhere, to suit my taste."

He plodded off up the trail, and we laid our fires for the night, and I took my part with some haste. My partner noticed it, and growled as he stooped over and thrust short logs against the face of clay and gravel that was to be thawed out to expose its contents.

"I suppose," he half groaned, in an amused voice, "that I've got to make the trip with you again to-night. Let me see. Yes, this is the regular night. It looks to me as if I stand to lose any way it's fixed up. If you get the girl, I lose a real partner. If you lose her, you'll be worse than a bear with a sore head, and I'm out. But I'll go with you, just the same."

He grinned up at me, knowing that I was too embarrassed and annoyed to retort. But it was my night to visit the camp, and even his gibes could not deter me.

"I'm not even going up to say 'Howdy' this evening," Dan said, parting from me at the beginning of the row. "It's a long, cold walk up there for a feller that ain't been sent for. Mercury's all frozen, everywhere. Davis Pain Killer bottle busted this afternoon, and I'm plum' anxious to dance some. I'll be here, somewhere. So long!"

He turned, and dodged into the Honolulu, from which issued hilarious sounds, and I hastened on up the trail. I was late, and Kentucky was already there, and this time he had brought a

banjo with him, and was singing when I entered. He stopped long enough to grin a welcome, and then went on shouting a negro song in his inimitable drawling voice.

Bill Wilton appeared saner than I had seen him in some time, and was venting hoarse cackles of laughter. Now and then he would look bewildered, and appear intent on trying to remember something, perhaps some familiar strain that he had heard in the old past. Kentucky brought his hand across the strings with a heavy sweep, as he finished the doleful chant of "How the Possum Lost His Ta-a-ail," and tossed the banjo over on top of the skin-covered couch.

"Beat you in to-night, Tom," he grinned. "Had to come down to relieve my feelin's. I'm as happy as a coon, when he finds three dogs and a nigger under his home tree."

I surmised that his words covered some other feeling than elation.

"What is the matter now?" I asked.

He looked grave for an instant, and then said: "Nothing, except that our claim's a dead one, and we've decided to abandon it, and look for a lay."

I was genuinely sorry for Kentuck, because I liked him.

"Are you certain?" I asked.

"Yes. We've crosscut the gulch from rim to rim, and never had a pay pan. We've proved that we're too high for the feed of the pay streak, wherever it may be."

He sat there and frowned for a moment, and I knew of what he was thinking—the best part of a season wasted; the long hours of hard work in the savage cold; the hopelessness of trying to get a lease at that time of the year on any ground that was worth while, and the futility of striking out on a prospecting trip. He glanced up, and read the sympathy in my eyes.

"Thanks," he said soberly. "You're all right, Tom. Just keep me in mind, won't you? And if you hear of anything, let me know."

Bessie was full of suggestions, but they were not altogether practical. The most promising venture was merely a little better than prospecting—the possibility of logging farther up the river, and running the timbers down to the camp when the spring floods were over to sell to arrivals. His ill fortune sobered our visit, and we started away earlier than usual, walking down the trail together, after bidding Bessie good night.

"I've got to drop in along the line here to find Dan," I said. "Suppose you come with me, and we'll see if he knows of anything. He usually has a card or two up his sleeve."

We turned into the Honolulu, and found it strangely deserted.

"What's up?" Kentuck asked Hopkins, the proprietor, who was sitting gloomily by his stove.

"All right up to an hour ago," he said, as if we had referred to his business alone, "and then somebody came in and said that Sam Barstow was up at the Horn Spoon trying to break the bank, and every one stampeded."

"Then that's where we must go," cheerfully responded Kentuck, leading the way toward the door.

We went into the Horn Spoon, and almost as we opened the storm door knew that something unusual was taking place. There was an air of suppressed excitement in its very atmosphere, an undercurrent of tensity. The wheel was not running as usual, and the back end of the room appeared deserted. Around the center table there was a crowd, the outer edges on tiptoe. There was scarcely a word being said, and the place was filled with that ominous silence which comes when big stakes are being played. Its very lamps, with their tin reflectors, seemed looking downward to one spot. We got to the edge of the crowd, and looked over others' shoulders.

At the table but one man was playing, and that was Sam Barstow, who sat with his hat down over his eyes. Marie Devinne was clicking the case buttons, and Spider Riggs, immaculate and immobile as usual, was dealing the cards, his long, slender fingers slipping back and forth as he drew them from the case, or reached over and raked in the chips. Evidently Barstow was

playing recklessly, for his bets were large in blue chips, whose value I knew was five dollars each. He was shoving stacks of them over, and his customary coolness appeared to have deserted him, for at each successive loss he swore volubly. Dan was there, and our eyes met. He winked at me with gravity, and edged around to my side.

"That idiot is locoed," he muttered. "He's lost at least seven or eight thousand dollars already, and is about to dip into his last thousand. Been playing on Cavanaugh's receipt for money in the A. C. safe. He acts half mad. Watch him."

Barstow was playing a combination of cards, and Riggs was asking him if his bets were all down.

"Yes," he said, "go ahead."

Slowly the cards came out. It seemed as if every "coppered card" won, and every one without the little tablet lost. His luck was reversed. He sat motionless and gloomy, as pile after pile of his chips were drawn in and slipped back into the chip rack with the sharp, timed clicking, as the slender, manicured finger of Spider Riggs snipped them into place. For an instant he sat there and swore softly, and Riggs waited.

"Well," he challenged, "got enough? Anybody else around here want to try his luck?"

He stared with insolent triumph at the faces girdling the table, and no one moved. Every one was watching Sam Barstow, whose drawn brows and set lips told of his rising anger.

He suddenly thrust all his remaining chips across on the table.

"I'll make a stab to call the turn," he growled, and Riggs, after another deliberate pause, slipped the last cards from the box. He laughed a little as he raked in the chips, and Marie Devinne lifted the sides of the case rack, and let the buttons go slipping back.

Barstow gave a last oath, and jumped to his feet so suddenly that his stool was overturned. He glared at Spider Riggs, as if undecided what to say, and then almost shouted: "You got me! If it hadn't been that Marie had the cases, I'd 'a' thought the game was crooked. I'm through with you. You're good and welcome. Let me out of this!"

He broke through the crowd, and elbowed his way toward the bar.

"How much of a stake have I got left?" he demanded, and the bartender, calmly looking up at him, called across the room to Spider Riggs: "What's the tally?"

"Seven thousand five hundred," Riggs called back, with a certain note of gloating satisfaction in his voice.

"Five hundred left," the bartender answered Barstow. "You don't seem to have much luck to-night. Have something?"

The miner stalked to the bar, and seized a bottle of *hutchnu,* the soul and body-destroying liquor of Alaska, filled a glass to the brim, and drained it at a gulp. He put the glass down again, and refilled it, and Kentucky Smith at my side nudged me, and whispered: "Travelin' a few, isn't he?"

The room was beginning to reek with sound again, and the wheel had started its rounds, while the man behind it shouted: "Try your luck here, gentlemen."

The lure of the clicking ball appeared to attract Sam Barstow, and he banged his heavy fist down on the bar, and whirled around.

"I've got five hundred left," he asserted belligerently, "and I'll take a chance on busting the wheel."

He shoved men aside as he made his way over to it, and stood.

"What's the limit here?" he demanded.

"The bank roll," was the calm response. "It's worth more than your five hundred."

"Give me the chips," Barstow growled, and did not trouble to seat himself, but stood erect at the end of the table.

Again the room was silenced, and men surged toward the gambler. Dan and I found ourselves jammed up against the side, where we could not for the moment extricate ourselves. Playing a hundred dollars at a wager,

the angry victim of ill fortune threw his chips out, selecting the number fifteen as a favorite. It lost. Three times he tried it, and each time became angrier as it failed to appear. With a sudden gesture of defiance, he shoved all his remaining chips on the red. Marie Devinne had crowded through to his shoulder, and tried to get him to change his wager.

"Don't be a chump," she insisted. "It's a fool's play."

But he turned toward her, and frowned.

"You let me alone," he said, and she shrugged her shoulders, and watched the ball start its course, as if fascinated.

There was a tense moment as it dropped downward from the rim, and began rattling and bouncing across the partitions. Slower and slower it ran, and then poised itself as the wheel slowed down, and appeared to be balanced. Barstow's fury was in suspense. He leaned forward on his knuckles at the end of the table, and fixed his staring, excited eyes on it, with a hard, glittering frown.

The ball wavered as the wheel went round, and then slowly, and as if maliciously, it fell from the partition with a soft click, and swam slowly around. The wheel man did not touch it, but stood with folded arms, appreciating the danger of appearing too eager to announce the result. It had fallen into the green of the "oo", and the house had won.

It seemed to me, standing there by the side, and feeling a sort of sympathy for the fool, that every one in the place had held his breath up to that moment, and now gave a sigh. But the silence held as we waited to hear what Barstow would say.

I had a vague impression that the bartender had climbed to the top of his bar, and was looking down over the crowd; that Spider Riggs was standing on a chair behind, and that Big Jim was grinning over the shoulders of Kentucky Smith. I had witnessed other and heavier gambling than this, but none where there seemed to be so much concentrated fury in the loser. It was as if Barstow had been restraining himself all the evening, and now that his last savings had been swept away, broke loose.

He suddenly thrust his elbows backward, rudely making room for himself, and jerked the tails of his blue shirt loose from under his mackinaw. He tore at the belt around his waist, and fumbled beneath, then there was the sound of a harsh sweep and his oath, intermingled.

"Think you've got me, eh? Well, you ain't. Turn her for that, and may the curse of the devil take you if it doesn't win!"

He swung something high in the air, and brought it smashing down on the table, with a dull, heavy, crunching sound. It was a gold belt that he had carried over his hips, its pockets bulging with weight. The force of its heaviness and the blow broke it open, and I gave a gasp.

From its burst apertures rolled out, across the table, over the numbers of the cloth, and to the very floor itself, nuggets of gold. And they were red—glowing dully, red as the single nugget of ill omen I had seen in Cavanaugh's fingers, and held in my palm, unmistakably the red of the gold that had cost poor old Bill Wilton his reason, his happiness, and his wife.

There was a sharp gasp of indrawn breaths, as men, though unfamiliar with the legend, leaned forward and stared at that strange gold. They knew in a flash that Sam Barstow's mysterious trip had not been without results. I doubt if there were more than two men in the room, however, beside myself, who understood to the full what that red gold meant. It filled me with a strange horror, and, half faint and sick, I backed away from it, and crowded my way to the door, jerked it open, and stepped outside into the clean night air. One man followed on my heels, and I whirled to face him. It was Cavanaugh, and he met my eyes with a long, meaning stare.

"Pitkok!" he said hoarsely, in a strained voice. "Pitkok went with him,

and showed the way. Pitkok, poor devil, learned the secret of it from some of the sagas of his tribe, and took that man to it. And I know how Pitkok died!"

I held myself rigid as I, too, surmised the tragedy, the murder, when the red lust had cankered the mind of Sam Barstow, honest up to that fateful hour.

Cavanaugh knew that I understood. He suddenly turned, and hurried away down the white trail, with his hands thrust deeply into his pockets, and his head bent low, as if grieving over this exposure of a fellow being's cruel cupidity, and I looked up at the door, which opened, to release my partner into the arms of the night.

CHAPTER VI.

We did not see the end of that night of gaming, for we were depressed, and hurried back to the gulch, running now and then between the long slopes, and up that stretch of trail which lay along the white surface of the river. But we heard of the outcome two nights later, when Kentucky came down to our cabin to learn if we had any news for him.

"I reckon you-all heard what happened after you left the Horn Spoon the other night?"

"No," we chorused, looking at him.

"Well, that Sam Barstow sure had the devil's own luck from the minute he banged that queer-lookin' gold of his on the wheel. He broke the wheel in one turn, and Billy Abramsky pulled the cloth over it. Then he howled like a timber wolf with joy, and went back to the layout. He grabbed up that belt he had around him, put the gold back in it, buckled it under his shirt, and started in to play with what he'd got from the wheel. In just two hours he'd won his eight thousand back, and at seven in the mornin' he walked out of the Horn Spoon with eighteen thousand dollars of its money, and a bill of sale for the place."

It was astonishing news, and our exclamations betrayed our surprise.

"Yes, sir, the Horn Spoon's got a new proprietor now. It's Sam Barstow, and he's runnin' the place. The boys that owned it are workin' for him. He hasn't got time. Too busy payin' his fond respects to Marie Devinne. I reckon, too, that he'll get her. He looks pretty good to her, with all the wad of dust he has, and with that red stuff that makes folks believe there might be plenty more where that came from. I reckon Sam Barstow's due to make a home stake."

Kentucky was sitting with his elbows on his knees, and his moccasin heels up on the rungs of his stool, and his eyes looked thoughtfully at the little round hole in the end of the Yukon stove, that seemed to be watching him. I fancied I read a trace of homesickness in his boyish eyes, and a despondency that I had never before seen in them.

The country and its round of misfortune appeared to be telling on him. I was sorry that all our efforts had failed to develop any chance for him that was worth taking. All the ground worth leasing had been let out long before that time, and there were but few claims working where men were hired for day's wages. We tried to talk cheerfully to him, but he must have felt that we had nothing to offer, and that our encouragement was hollow, when he left us that night to tramp back up to his cabin at the head of the gulch.

It stands out, quite clear to me in the light of after events, the peculiar amazement I felt on the following morning. Yet in the telling it seems nothing.

I had got up early, it being my week to build the fire and cook the breakfast, a simple, primitive task; for our larder was scant as measured by civilized standards. It was still dark, and the candles, stuck in homemade brackets in the corner by the stove, writhed and twisted as the heat waves eddied upward, and the room was choked with the fumes of bacon frying, and desiccated eggs simmering on the back of the stove, and the blubbering of the oatmeal pot.

Dan threw his legs out of the bunk,

gasping, and called sleepily: "Hey, Tom! Your bacon's going too hot. Give us a breath of air, can't you?"

I choked, and laughed, and went to the door and threw it open. Coming up the trail, far down the hillside, was a sled drawn by straining Malemutes, who looked like the wolves of death in that pallid hour. I stood with the frying pan in hand, looking at them when they stopped, and their driver turned up the trail leading to our cabin, leaving his team behind. He advanced until he was close to me.

"Chimoy!" I called the native greeting, and then, still in the tongue: "What do you want?"

He answered in English:

"Want moose meat?"

"Moose meat? Sure!"

It was like the voice of an angel, the proffer of any one offering fresh meat to men who had lived on tinned stuff and bacon for so many months. Dan came hurrying to the door with the strings of his moccasins dangling and trailing behind him, and his hair still ruffled.

"How much you take? Heap good meat, huh?" he called.

The visitor stood quietly for an instant, and then approached until he stood in front of us. I saw that he was not of any tribe with which I was familiar. There was less of the Oriental squattiness of face, less of the Oriental squattiness of figure. He was lithe and straight, and his nose was the high, fine, warrior nose of the red-Indian tribes—the nose of the hereditary fighter and hunter. His eyes were frowning, and with a certain defiant dignity.

"You needn't trouble to talk pidgin English to me," he said, with perfectly correct pronunciation. "I can speak it as well as you can. I am a Sioux! No dog-trotting, fish-eating mongrel of a Siwash. I have moose meat to sell. It will cost you a dollar a pound."

There was an instant's silence, and then I tried to soften his indignation with a question. "A Sioux? And away up here? Why?"

"To hunt. To make a living."

His voice sounded as if he were slightly mollified.

"Where did you go to school?" I asked, still feeling that strange curiosity.

"Carlisle. But do you want fresh meat?"

He had repulsed our overtures again, and was all Sioux, ugly and aloof; so we bought from him what meat we could use, and saw him start up the creek on his journey without regret. We talked of him after he had gone, and I think in a measure I sympathized with him, the descendant of a race of warriors and hunters, who had refused to live anywhere except in the condition of his heredity.

"It was easy to tell he'd been somewhere with white men," Dan commented. "Did you notice his tooth?"

"No," I said, interested.

"Why, one of his front teeth had been broken off, and fixed with silver. Shows he knew what dentists were for, but thought silver good enough for a Sioux!"

I did remember something about his crooked lips when he spoke, but had not been as observing as my partner.

Kentucky and I talked of the Sioux when we visited the camp and Bessie Wilton, together, on the following night. She scoffed at any sentiment.

"I saw him," she said. "He came into the post to buy some stuff. I don't see him as you do. He is treacherous, and a savage still, more savage than any Alaskan native, in spite of his Carlisle education. There is cruelty in him, and it peers from his eyes. Ugh! He makes me shiver! He stands so immovable! He stares at one so steadily, and with a sort of contempt. And that isn't all!"

She threw her hands upward, and shook her head.

"Didn't try to bite you, did he?" Kentuck drawled, in a teasing voice.

She ignored him, and spoke to me. "He wanted the best string of beads in the post. It was part of a rosary, and there was a cross on it. He bought it, and then, what do you think he did? Wrenched the cross loose, and ground it

under his heel! And he sneered at me when I expostulated."

"Sneered? Sneered at you? Why, the first time I meet him I'll twist his dirty neck!" Kentucky burst forth in indignant, boyish wrath. "The scrubby scoundrel! To show his blasphemous impertinence before a white girl. I'll teach him!"

I cannot but admit that I shared his anger, although I said nothing, when I thought of the Sioux's insolence. Yet I knew that perhaps there had been no intention to affront one whom he saw as a mere person behind a counter in a frontier post.

"The natives call him the Hatchet," she went on, without noticing Kentucky's outburst. "I believe they are all a little afraid of him; but he is smart. They say he can speak their language. Oh, but say! Have you heard of the camp courtship? Sam Barstow has infatuated your friend Marie."

She looked at Kentuck mischievously.

"They are to be married. They say he is loading her with presents, and he has bought that cabin that Sturgis and Buckingham built, the one back toward the gulch, and has four or five men making it suitable for the residence of the charming Marie. This camp is not without society, you know."

She ended with a drawling laugh, and Kentuck took advantage of the pause to say that he wished he could have got the job of carpentering for the cabin. We did not laugh at that, for I think we both surmised that Kentuck's financial outlook was worrying him more than he cared to mention.

"And the wedding," Bessie went on hurriedly, as if to arouse Kentucky from his brooding, and rally him to better spirits, "takes place day after to-morrow—that is, the night after to-morrow night. Had you heard that yet?"

The Kentuckian came gallantly to a recovery.

"No, we hadn't heard that," he asserted. "Now, what other news is there hereabouts, Miss Walkin' Newspaper?"

She laughed, seeing that he was in a better mood, and for an hour subtly encouraged him, told of camp rumors, and of native gossip, until we went away.

And we, with every one else on the gulch, attended the wedding of Sam Barstow and Marie Devinne. The Horn Spoon was its setting. The paraphernalia of chance had been removed, and the floor cleaned and waxed to a glistening white, and no man might buy anything at the bar. A United States commissioner, from Taninaw, performed the ceremony, and it was somewhat oratorical, inasmuch as the gentleman was from Texas, and loved flowers of speech. There was a good deal of the "grand old flag" business, and a lot of talk about the hardy pioneer, and the wealth of the nation being in its offspring, and Sam Barstow caught his bride in his big arms, held her up, and kissed her, threw a bag of dust in the commissioner's hands, and invited everybody to "have somethin'."

It was while standing in front of the pine bar that he made his wedding present. He winked at the bartender, and called in a loud voice: "Give me that package for Mrs. Barstow, will you?"

The bartender handed him a bundle, and from it Sam took out something that made us stare—that is, it made Cavanaugh and me interchange glances. It was a pair of moccasins, absurd and heavy. They were literally covered with gold, and it required no second glance to see that the gold was red! He had taken the gold he had gathered from that Northern trip, and selected and hammered nuggets enough to present his bride with a pair of gold moccasins.

Pierced, and laid thickly over the buckskin, they were cumbersome, and showy, and red. He insisted on putting them on her feet, and she shambled less lightly in the dance as she carried their weight. But one round of the room she made when the wretched attempt at an orchestra began, and then, panting, she exchanged them for her others, and relinquished them to the care of the bartender.

A native from across the river, who had timidly entered the door, looked at them with wide eyes, and abruptly

turned and vanished into the night. A prospector from the Hootalinqua peered at them, started to test their weight in his hand, and then drew back. The music went on, and above it all rose the boisterous shouts of Sam Barstow, urging his guests to "Hit her up! Step lively!"

"Them's some moccasins," the bartender remarked, as he threw them back on the bar. "They weigh an even forty ounces, and that spells about seven hundred and fifty dollars, the way gold's runnin' now. Some golden shoes, eh?"

The men standing in front of his bar assured him vociferously that they were. Only Cavanaugh and I, standing there at the end, and not participating, failed to wonder whence came the gold.

"Come on. Let's go home," a voice sounded behind me, and I turned to see my partner, who was apparently satisfied with the night's entertainment, and, with a curt good night to the trader, I went.

I did not see the moccasins of gold again for some time. At least a month went by, in which my partner and I continued to work, with always alluring and never satisfying prospects. And in that time the news of the camp down on the river, with its small happenings, drifted upward to our gulch with more or less veracious details. Now it was that the Hatchet had been away on another hunting trip, and returned without meat, the game having run toward the east; now that some one had struck pay on Hoosier Creek; and again that Sam Barstow had gone down to the mouth of the Taninaw—two days' hard travel—to buy some extra furnishings and supplies from a steamer which had laid up there for the winter.

It was in the early days of February when the most exciting news broke, and, as fate would so have it, it was on another night when I was in the camp. For three days no one had seen Marie Barstow, and—coincidentally, the camp believed—no one had seen Spider Riggs. In that time Sam Barstow had wandered backward and forward in the Horn Spoon, glowering at any one who spoke, and muttering to himself.

It was the talk of the camp on the night when I went down alone. I was in no mood for the divided companionship of Bessie, and Kentuck was there in her cabin, gay and musical as ever. After a short visit, I excused myself on the ground of my partner's anxiety to return quickly, and went down the hill with a certain bitterness in my heart. It was not late in the evening, but the night was gloomy and lighted by the stars alone.

I looked in at the Horn Spoon and the Honolulu. In neither place did I see Sam Barstow. I turned for the long, lonely walk over the trail leading to the mines, for I had misled—plainly lied—to Bessie Wilton and Kentucky, when I intimated that I had been accompanied by my partner.

I stopped for an instant where the trail entered the low-lying and scraggly pines and firs shutting off the view of the camp. From that site it was black, a gathering of low-built log cabins, with windows fronting the white expanse of the river only. I was almost beyond the sound of its night voice. Nearest to me was the pretentious structure which Sam Barstow called home.

I stood musing over the disappearance of Marie, and wondering if she were there, when suddenly, as if from all sides of it, belched sound and flame. The spot was a lurid mass of light. I surmised that it had been blown up, and ran toward it. Men were running from other directions, also, and the night had become a pandemonium.

We began hurrying toward the cabin, to save its contents, when a voice bellowed commandingly, from the outer darkness, rendered more dense by the flames: "Let it alone! It's mine. I want it to burn!"

We who were there, and others running toward us, turned in the direction of the voice, arrested by its savage order. Into the edge of the light stalked Sam Barstow, and in his hand was a gun. The light played dully on its blue barrel and his knuckles, for he gripped it tightly.

"I blew it up!" he said, so loudly that his voice could be heard above the

crackling of the flames that were gaining headway, and the sound of moccasins crunching over the frozen snow as other men arrived, panting, and formed a circle around him. "It was mine. I'm through with it."

He stood and cursed for a moment, and I stared closer at him, wondering if he had been drinking to excess; but the light that was in his smoldering eyes was not that of drunkenness.

"I built that cabin for her," he said, still speaking in loud vigor. "You know who I mean. I did other things for her, and after that I wasn't an honest man. I went after it, and got it—the red gold. I even gave that to her. You saw the moccasins! And what did I get in the end? When I came back from Taninaw, I trailed till late in the morning to be with her. She was there, all right! And that sneaking-faced Spider Riggs was with her! With my wife! Do you know what I did with them?"

He shook his hands in the air, one fist clenched, and the other still holding the gun.

"I drove 'em before me on the trail for a full twenty-four hours, without blankets or tent to shelter 'em, and grub enough for only a day's rations. Then I told 'em if they ever came back, or I ever saw 'em again, I'd kill 'em like the Judases they were. And they're gone! I knew they wouldn't come back. I knew they'd die together out there in the cold, and that it beat killin' 'em then and there. She could go out with those cursed moccasins in her hands. They were all I gave her. And I'm through with it all. Get out of my way!"

He had swung with his last words on the men nearest him, and they opened out to give him passage. He walked with steady steps toward the river bank, and plunged down it, and out upon the white expanse. He did not pause or look back, and we thought he was heading for the native village on the opposite bank. His steps led him toward the one dark spot on the river's face, where the camp water hole was kept open throughout the winter season. Against the snow and under the brightening stars, he was plainly visible as he halted by it, and then his voice came to us across the stillness:

"Good-by! I'll save you a burial."

His arm seemed waving toward us, and then there was a short, white flash of yellow, and his figure appeared to crumple forward and plunge into the dark spot.

"Shot himself!" several men exclaimed, as we ran down the bank, and out toward the water hole. There was nothing there but the black water rushing fiercely and smoothly toward the ice-bound Ramparts. The thin coating of ice that had formed since the last bucket had been dipped into it in the evening had given way beneath the falling weight, and Barstow's last words had proved true. He had saved us the trouble of burying him.

CHAPTER VII.

The water ran so black and cold! It was gruesome to remember that but a minute before a man, a strong man, in the flush of life, had stood there, and then deliberately chosen it as his resting place! The stars shone as they had in that minute before, and the river's surface was as white, and off on the bank the lights of the cabins glowed, and the fire of the cabin that he had fitted for his bride burned higher and higher, as if it were a funeral pyre.

"He's gone, all right!" some one said, and we turned back toward the camp.

I tramped homeward after the moon had come up, thinking of the whole sordid tragedy. It did seem as if coincidence, or something else, had been at work. I could not share the superstition of the red gold. It was beyond reason that it should have played any part in this melodrama of the wilderness. And yet there it was!

Every one, so far as I knew, who had ever had anything to do with it had paid a price. Bill Wilton his reason, Pitkok his life, Sam Barstow, first his honesty and then his life; and the lure of it had led Marie Devinne, the silly little dance-hall girl, to marry him. Perhaps the moccasins had led Spider Riggs to her side, and her undoing. And Sam Bar-

stow had driven them out to a lingering death, with the moccasins in their hands, then brooded over it, and been his own executioner.

I laughed at myself for fancying that the gold was the cause of it all as I went wearily up the trail, to be met by the dogs, to stumble into our cabin, and awaken Dan to tell him of the tragedy. I was ashamed of myself when I put the question to him, as he sat there in his bunk smoking and listening:

"Do you suppose there is anything in that story of the gold being cursed?"

"Cursed, nothing!" he rumbled. "I only wish I had some of it, and knew where it was. I'd take the curse off it. That's a squaw's yarn, and nothin' more."

I pulled off my damp moccasins, and opened the ventilator in the roof. I was sick of the whole sordid sorrow, and of the camp itself. I was also jealous and discouraged, because Kentucky Smith, buoyant and lovable, appeared to have the lead in the good graces of the only girl I had ever loved. Yes, I admitted it! She was all there was in life to me, and I hungered for her, and wanted her more than I wanted anything, even life itself.

My last words, as I crawled into my bed, and pulled the fur robe up around my ears, were: "I shan't go to that camp again for a week."

I fancied that I heard a soft chuckle from the bunk above mine.

"Well, I mean it!" I asserted angrily. But I was mistaken in my forecast, although not in my resolution.

It was the very next afternoon that I heard a cheerful voice from the trail that wound past our ever-growing and ever-worthless dump. It was that of Kentucky.

"Hey, Tom," he shouted, "the mail's in. Windy Jim brought it down from Dawson. Come, go down with me?"

In that glorious excitement I forgot that I had said I should not return to Neucloviat for a whole seven days. The arrival of the first mail in six months was too much of a temptation. It meant letters from home, news from the vast outside world from which we were shut off by thousands of miles of forest and mountain, of ice-clad rivers and snow-bound plains.

Dan came up the windlass rope hand over hand, and shouted: "What's that? Did I hear the word 'Mail'?"

"You did," was Kentucky's answer. "Some of the boys told me it came in this morning."

"Then here goes," Dan jubilated. "Up to the cabin for ours, to get on some dry moccasins and a fresh parka. Come on up, Kentuck, and we'll all go down together."

Before he had finished speaking, he was running up the path leading to the cabin on the shoulder of the hill, and we followed after. No one can appreciate the eagerness with which mail is greeted unless he has lived as we lived in those far-off days. The earth now has but few places where one could find such isolation. No one who has not so lived can understand that Presidential campaigns might be fought and new Presidents elected, installed, and in power, without the citizens knowing that he existed; that kings or queens might die and their successors step in to become public among the world's figureheads, without intelligent men being aware of their elevation; that earthquakes might destroy cities, and wars be waged and fought to the bitter end without patriots hearing, even vicariously, the thunder of the guns.

So we hurried away over the trail, whose shadows were rapidly deepening into the afternoon darkness of that time of the year, and entered the camp. We passed the still-smoldering ruins of what had been Sam Barstow's home, with no more than a swift, grieved thought, and hurried onward, forgetful of the man who would no longer look for the mails, to the trading post. A crowd was there. It seemed as if every man in the hills had heard the news as it passed from mouth to mouth, and had gathered into the smoky shadows of the post.

"More dust for you, Jim," shouted some one, as we opened the door, and the little man of the trails looked up at us over his frost-blistered cheeks, and grinned.

"About seven dollars' worth from you, Mister Kentucky Smith," he said, shuffling over the letters from the box in front of him. "A dollar apiece is what I have to tax you for 'em. It's a mighty long trail, and the weather's none too summerish."

Kentucky looked troubled, and I saw that he was embarrassed. I surmised that he had not that much money left in the world.

"Give me Dan's and mine, with his," I said, shoving myself forward, "and tell us how much they all come to, and I'll trip you my poke. It saves so much weighing."

Jim yelled a welcome to me, shook my hand, and as he began to gather the other letters together, said: "Good! That goes. Four for you, I think."

Kentuck smiled his gratitude at me, and I was glad that I had saved him the humiliation, for my experience has taught me that Kentuckians, even the most humble, have a rare sensitiveness, the sensitiveness of gentlemen.

We took our letters into the far corners to read them. Some of them were too sacred to be read in the midst of other men. Some of those in the room watched us curiously, for the day had witnessed emotions. It had seen men break down and cry, men who would not have cried if condemned to death within the coming hour. It had seen other men almost hysterical with happiness, and others who hurried away to their own cabins to ponder over the outcome of affairs left behind. It had seen men saved from financial wreck by the extension of a friendly draft; and so they watched us.

I had a letter from my mother, closing with its "God bless you, my boy," and one from a brother who besought me to abandon the quest, and come back to the soft life of the beaten tracks.

"Cleaned out!" I heard my partner's voice behind me. "Busted like an egg. Got nothin' left except what's here! All I've ever saved and sent out has been wiped up by the Ocean Bank, of San Francisco, where I salted it away."

My own happiness at the news that all was well was blurred by his words, for he was my partner, and good, and loyal, and true. I turned to sympathize with him. I had never heard him speak of his other life, left behind, out in the States, even in his most confidential moods; but I saw that he was hard hit for some reason I could not fully understand.

"Cheer up, old man," I said, laying a hand on his shoulder. "We'll make more, some time."

He looked at me for a long time, and his eyes were those of a sufferer.

"You see, you don't understand it all," he said. "It ain't exactly me alone. I've got two sisters. I never had no chance, and I wanted them to get the best there was. They're in a sort of young ladies' school back East, and—well, I've paid their expenses, and now they'll have to try to go to work. You know what that means for girls who don't know how!"

I nodded my head, and felt how much it meant to him.

"And that ain't all," he added, speaking in a lower tone. "I only had one brother, and he was white, clean through. And he helped me, always, when I was busted, so long as he lived. It wasn't so much, you understand, but when he died, and left no money, because he'd always helped me along, I swore I'd keep his wife and three kids from ever starvin'. And I've done it, up to now; but here we are on a claim that ain't made an ounce of dust, and the bank's gone under! The Ocean Bank, that everybody said was all right, and which was supposed to send money out of my eleven thousand every month to—well—to care for them other things!"

The magnitude of his loss overshadowed me, and I felt the far-reaching effects of that distant failure which might change the current of so many lives. My admiration for this silent, self-sacrificing man blazed fervidly, as I thought of all that he had borne, but never mentioned, in the two years of our companionship.

It seemed to me, standing there by his side in the dimness of the trading post, that all the world, that world outside,

depended on money—on the gold that we dug from the earth. His very helplessness, his inability to even send them a word of encouragement, the months of anxiety he must endure until he could know how they had fared, and what had become of them, were appalling. He loomed large and noble in my estimation as he stood there in the corner, perturbed and gripping himself, and I would have sacrificed much to have relieved him.

"Nothing but good news, I hope?"

Cavanaugh's voice claimed our attention.

"Oh, so-so!"

Dan was still trying to bear a brave front and conceal his wounds.

"Yes," I said, answering for myself, "I have no complaint."

The genial trader passed on, and I saw that he stepped wide to pass the saturnine Sioux; for the Hatchet was there, sneering at the emotions of the white men around him. His eyes met mine, and he conveyed to me a flash of dislike. We had met but once, and then had engaged in neither dispute nor conflict; but I saw that in his look which was malicious. Some grim prescience told me that we were not through with each other, and that his fate line ran with mine.

A group of men near us were discussing Sam Barstow's death, and in the other end of the room a man was reading a newspaper, months old, aloud, for the benefit of his hearers. Windy Jim was still serving out his letters, and weighing the gold dust from the buckskin bags thrown across to his hands.

Some one opened the door, and through it I saw that the day had given place to the blackness of night. A man came up and began to talk in low tones to my partner, as if intrusting him with a confidence, and I felt that I was an intruder.

"Pardon me," I interrupted. And then, to Dan: "I'll find you when I am ready to go home. I'm going up on the hill for a few minutes."

He nodded at me, and said I should find him there, and again turned a sympathetic ear toward the other man, his own worries suppressed under the mask of his face. I threaded my way toward the door, and pulled my parka hood up over my ears, and my mittens on my hands, and prepared to face that outer, deathlike chill; but my heart was warm as I thought of Bessie Wilton up there in the cabin on the hill, the girl whom I loved, and who I had reason to believe returned my affection.

The stillness of a world frozen brooded over the camp as I turned away from its turbulent front to the well-known path in the snow, that would take me to her door. My heart leaped with exultation as each step carried me nearer, and I dismissed from my mind, as much as I could, all other things but a memory of her face. A Malemute barked at me as I walked in front of one cabin, and I called to him, and held out my hand. Once the trail was lost in the dimness, and I stepped off, hip deep, into the yielding snow, and laughed aloud at my own hasty clumsiness.

I came around by the path leading to the rear, knowing that at that hour her father might be asleep in the front room. The light shone boldly through a window which I passed in going toward the door, and the blind was not drawn. I glanced in, and then came to an abrupt and withering halt.

Kentuck was standing there looking at her, and in his hand was a letter. She was standing before him with clasped hands upraised, and a look on her face such as I had never seen before. The light was so clear and full from the hanging lamp above, that I could catch even the stray glints in her hair, the soft sparkle of her eyes, her half-parted lips. Their very attitude made me pause, tense, and leaning forward, on the worn trail. It seemed fraught with significance, the entire picture, he standing there so clean cut, and handsome, and youthful, and she, so radiant and beautiful.

Suddenly, with lips that expressed a cry of happiness, although the sound did not reach me, she stepped across to him, and threw her arms about his neck, and pillowed her face contentedly against his breast. His arms infolded

her, the letter falling in fluttering, erratic circles to the floor. He bent his head over and kissed her on the waving hair, and his lips moved as his arms went round her. She looked up at him and spoke, with a face that betrayed her happiness.

My knees were weakening as I stood there on the cold snow outside, and it was no colder than my heart, which had turned to ice and frozen in my bosom. I clutched it with my hand, and gasped. The stars above had sharpened to leering, penetrating lights of mockery. The very trees of the forest behind seemed leaning forward to jeer at my distress. Life itself was an illusion, bitter and cynical!

I turned and staggered away down the trail, and that I stepped repeatedly from it and into the chilling drifts now gave me no thought, for I was miserable, and hope and ambition seemed to have been killed in one swift, unmistakable discovery. Elizabeth Wilton would never be more to me than a friend, and the youth and brilliancy of Kentuck had won. I was but an old, old man, without the grace of speech or accomplishment, and with nothing to offer to the one for whom I would have gladly surrendered life itself!

CHAPTER VIII.

I believe that uncommunicative men suffer more than others. I sometimes felt in the week following the discovery that Elizabeth Wilton and Kentucky loved each other, that if I could only find words to tell Dan, I should feel better; for I knew that he surmised that something had gone amiss, for he ceased mentioning trips to the camp, or Bessie. And at times I felt my own selfishness for not extending to him in his troubles more thought.

My pride made me pull myself together enough to make one more visit to her home, and explain that we were working so hard I could not find time to come as frequently as I had, and I could not tell from the expression of her eyes whether she was pleased or not. I conjectured that she would be happier through my absence, and, as for myself, knew that I should be, for to look at her stabbed me with hopeless longing.

To my own credit I affirm that I sustained no bitterness toward my successful rival, and was but glad that, if I could not win her love, he was the fortunate one. But it was more difficult to hide my wound from him than any one else. He had secured a week's work windlassing on a claim but three above ours, and whenever he went to the camp unfailingly stopped and asked me to go with him, and was unfailingly refused on the pretext of hard work. It was just eight days since I had been there that he insisted so vigorously that I was hard put to find pretext for not going.

"You've just got to go with me tonight," he said, "because if you don't Bess will think you're sore over somethin'. You really ain't, are you?"

I saw that the preservation of my secret demanded the trip, and I went. It was an evening of agony. From her very attitude I felt that she was outdoing herself to be pleasant and agreeable to me, and to conceal what I knew of her relations with Kentucky, which were not mentioned. I appreciated that delicacy, for it is sometimes policy to permit wounds to heal, and I thought they must have surmised that I had some inkling of conditions. It was one of the most bitter evenings I ever passed, and I was glad when we turned down the hill toward the camp.

The Horn Spoon was running as noisily as if its owner had not killed himself, after condemning to slow death two of those who had been its employees. But to me it offered nothing to relieve my mind of gloom.

"Hello, boys!" Windy Jim greeted us, as we stood near the door.

He came toward us, and then stepped to a row of pegs at the end of the bar, and took down an elaborately thrummed and beaded squirrel parka, and stood doubling the big "sunrise" hood so that it would muffle his neck.

"Haven't seen you since the mail came in, Tommy," he said to me, talking as he prepared to go outside.

"No. Working," I replied.

"And where in the name of old Solomon and his glory are you going with all that fancy rig?" drawled Kentucky. "What's up? Celebration of some sort? It ain't the Fourth of July, is it?"

Jim laughed, and stood facing us as he pulled on his mittens.

"No," he said. "Just goin' to see some fun. Big squaw dance over across the river to-night. Some kin folks of old Singer has come down from up above. Say, come on, go over. It'd please the old man a whole lot, and you'll see the real swell Taninaw society there a-shakin' its light fantastic feet. Come on over! You got time. We'll come back and sleep in my cabin. It's too dark to mush out to the gulch to-night."

I was eager for some change—anything to get away from myself. I hesitated, and Kentuck added his insistence, with a boyish fervor.

"Let's go, old Sobersides," he said. "Dan knows you are liable to stay in the camp if the notion takes you. He won't worry."

And in an impulsive mood for anything out of the ordinary, I consented.

Singer was a squaw man, who believed in corporal punishment for his better half, but was usually unable to carry it through. He had been a whaler, and in his youth was probably a hardy customer in a rough-and-tumble fight; but his youth had gone, and nothing save his valor and conviction that a man should be master of his own house remained. The lady of his devotion, Black Ellen, weighed about two hundred pounds, while he was a dried-up little wisp of a man, and when he began to exercise his prerogative of punishing her, she usually bore it patiently for about so long, then "turned loose," and hammered him into a state of submission.

They told the story that after one of these family affairs, when passing prospectors, attracted by the din, came to his rescue, and revived him to consciousness by dumping a pail of water over his "bloody but unbowed head," he sat weakly up, blinked his swollen eyes, and then said to Ellen: "I guess you'll be good now, won't you? If you don't I'll have to beat you up again!" And Ellen, unscarred, and not even breathing hurriedly, meekly said she would.

The lights of his cabin, the most pretentious on that bank, glowed vividly as a beacon when we followed the worn trail across the river. Long before we reached that side we heard the brazen note of a cornet played by a man who had once been a trumpeter in the regular army, but had forgotten even that accomplishment. The steady, finishing notes of "Ta—da—da-a-a!" prolonged and descending, told that he was doing his best to put an artistic finish to each measure, and that a waltz was in progress.

The smoke of the stovepipe was curling straight upward, a distinguishable gray, and told us that Singer's big cabin was superheated for the event. The dogs outside were squatted at a distance from the cabin, and howling a melancholy and disturbed accompaniment to the music from within. Boisterous shouts, rendered faint by the log walls, exuded outward, and the major population of the village seemed to be in attendance.

"Sounds as if they were raisin' Cain, don't it?" Windy Jim said, as we came to the door. "Singer's ball is certainly doin' itself some proud."

He opened the door without knocking, and we stepped inside. The noise was coming almost entirely from the white men who were participating, and the natives sat stolidly on the floor at the foot of the wall around the room. Some of them grinned laboriously in an effort to adopt the white man's expression of enjoyment, and Singer himself was just calling "partners for a square dance."

Kerosene lamps borrowed from every available source rendered the room fairly light. They exposed the bark-covered roof poles above, the heavy ridge log, the logs at the sides, and the peeled poles which formed the partition for a back room. They showed the curling whorls of smoke,

the pictures cut from old Sunday newspapers and pasted decoratively on the wall, and a lurid picture of the Virgin and Child brought from some mission. White men and bucks began to make the circle of the squaws and *klootches* squatted on the floor in their ludicrous finery, fashioned after the few white women's costumes they had seen, and soon there were eight couples waiting for the music to begin.

"By golly! I didn't see you come in!" Singer exclaimed, discovering us, and hurried over to shake our hands. "Pretty nice of you to come, Tom. Never saw you go to no dance before. Ellen! Oh, Ellen! Why don't you git up, and come and shake hands with your guests?"

Ellen waddled over to us obediently, and shook hands in a limp way, that belied her strength. She interrupted herself to seize a dog that had nosed the door open, and entered. She caught him by the scruff of the neck with those same limp fingers, and he let out an expostulatory howl of agony as she dragged him to the door, and administered a kick with her moccasined toe that sent him flying out into the snow.

"You talk to Ellen," Singer said. "I'm callin'," and signaled to the so-called orchestra, which sawed into the strains of "Buffalo Gals, Ain't Ye Comin' Out To-night."

The feet beat rhythmically on the rough slab floor, and the white men lugubriously executed jig steps on the corners when called upon to "Balance all," and lifted the screaming squaws from the floor, and whirled them bodily when admonished to "swing your pardners." The bucks danced sedately, as usual, and appeared to accept the amusement as extremely hard work, and a white man's innovation.

Over in one corner an old man threatened to disrupt the orchestra with an alarm clock he had evidently traded for, and which he kept winding, to set off the bell. No sooner would its clangor die away than he would gravely start it going again, as if he regarded himself a most valuable adjunct to the music. And I am not sure but he was, for no caterwauling of sound could have been worse than that which emanated from the band.

"See those two fellers dancin'?" Jim asked, catching my arm, and holding his head closer that he might speak in my ear direct.

He pointed at two white men who were in one of the sets, and I have looked upon few harder faces. I had never seen them before, although I thought I knew every white man in the district.

"Yes. What about them?"

"That's Royce and Sparhawk. Ever hear of 'em before?"

The names meant nothing to me, and I said so.

"Well, they're two of the men tried for dynamitin' in the Cœur d'Alene riots. They got off because there wasn't evidence against 'em; but everybody knows they was guilty. Bad medicine, both of 'em! Rob anything from a stage to a sluice box, and a man's life wouldn't stand between them and a dollar."

The music had stopped between two numbers, and Jim waited patiently for it to renew itself, as if fearing that his comments might be overheard. The instant it began he again mumbled rapidly in my ear:

"There's been a killin' or two on the trail out of Dawson, and while I don't say these fellers did it, they found it mighty convenient to get out and across the line, where there ain't no Mounted Police. I passed their camp on the way down, and you can bet I didn't let 'em know I was carryin' mail. I'm afraid of 'em. They're up to somethin', you can bet!"

I watched them more closely after that, and was impressed by two things—their swaggering bravado, and their shifting eyes. They were heavy men, with the shoulders of those who have worked much underground, stooped, and heavily muscled about the deltoids, and their movements were heavy and sure. One of them stopped after the set was over, made his way outside, and returned with a jug of *hutchnu*, which he passed around, boisterously

insistent that every one should have a drink with him.

To avoid offense, Kentuck, Jim, and I each lifted the jug to his lips. I turned to see who would follow us in this participation of hospitality, and saw behind me the Hatchet. I had not observed him before. He did not unfold his arms, and shook his head, scowling from his fierce black eyes at Royce, who had proffered it.

"You're the first Injun I ever saw that wouldn't drink when it didn't cost him nothin'," the Cœur d'Alener snarled, as if looking for trouble. "You ain't too cussed good to drink with a white man, air you?"

"No; but that doesn't imply that I'd drink with you."

It took a long time for the significance of that answer to penetrate the befuddled brain of Royce, or else he was surprised at hearing such perfect English from an Indian. He suddenly flared up, and, holding the jug forward with one hand, put the other behind him.

"You'll drink with *me,* and do it *now!*" he roared.

What the outcome might have been cannot be told, for the Sioux stood there without wavering, his arms still folded across his great chest, and his eyes unflinching and baleful; but the only man in the room who would perhaps have dared to thus interfere, Sparhawk, jumped behind his partner, caught the hand behind, and gave so sharp a jerk that Royce was whirled squarely around. A heavy gun rattled to the floor, and Sparhawk calmly picked it up and slipped it into his own shirt.

"You fool!" he growled, in a hoarse monotone. "What ails you? Take a fall to yourself. No trouble of any kind here! See? Go on, and shut your trap!"

As if brought to his senses by something suggestive in the speech, Royce lowered his hands, and started to the next guest.

"It's a good thing for you I didn't put it over," he said, over his shoulder, with a wolfish grin at the Hatchet.

"Perhaps," the latter sneered, exposing the silver tooth. And there was that in his tone that made me believe it was far better for Mr. Royce, for I believe the Hatchet would have killed him before he could have drawn a breath had that hand with a gun ever started to raise.

The villainous liquor appeared to warm the dancers to further exertions. On Singer's insistence, we danced. Kentuck's partner was one of the visiting "kinswomen." She had the boldest eyes I ever saw, and she was not without a sort of reckless, wild beauty. She was tall, for a native, and danced with a grace that was almost pantherish. She wore what appeared to be a cast-off silk dress such as dance-hall women sometimes wore. Kentuck had her as a partner in the waltz, and I was surprised to see how well she succeeded. He came back laughing and panting, and said: "What did you think of the 'Big Chicken'?"

"Big Chicken! Is that her name?"

"I don't know; but that's what I called her, and she seemed to like it. She's an educated *klootch*—that is, in some ways. Been out at Juneau for three years. Long enough to have learned to believe that the mission teachers down at the Holy Cross are a lot of fools, and that about the only thing worth having is plenty of money. Look at that Sioux watching her!"

Truly the Hatchet's eyes were following her as she went round the room, and she, at least, had no objections to *hutchnu,* for she took the jug from beneath the fiddler's chair, hoisted it on her arm in a manner betokening experience, and took a long pull at its contents.

"Good girl!" boisterously applauded Royce, taking the jug from her hands and following her example, while the Hatchet again backed against the wall, and held his unwavering eyes on him with a look that I should not have cared to have bestowed on me.

"That buck'll get him yet, unless he gets the buck first," Jim predicted in my ear. "Begins to look like heavy weather. Maybe we'd better pull out."

I think we should have done so had not some of the natives by the wall begun one of their weird songs, called the "Song of the Canoe," and they interested us, as they sat there swaying their bodies sidewise, and chanting in a monotonous voice. Others joined in, until the whole side of the room seemed bending in that almost hypnotic regularity of motion.

The singing became more boisterous as they took up another song, and the Big Chicken suddenly got to her feet, and plunged into the little back room of the cabin. She was gone several minutes, and when she returned two couples had begun waltzing, humming as they went, for the musicians had fallen into a pan of doughnuts, and refused to interrupt their feast. The Big Chicken emerged, looking full of Indian devilment; and Royce, seeing her, stumbled across the room, and caught her in his arms.

"This dance goes for me!" he vociferated, and they began to hum with the others, and circle, without reversing. There was some peculiarity in the sound of their shuffling feet. Something that went "clack, clack, clack!" Suddenly an old squaw at the side of the room leaped to her feet, and shrilled: "Ah-h-h-h!" Others sprang up, and drew back against the wall. The other couples stopped, but Royce and the Big Chicken went dizzily on, and the sound was more audible in the silence that seemed to have stopped other sound. All around me natives were straining forward, and, following their direction, I, too, looked.

In the dull light, as she whirled and her short skirts lifted, something at her feet shone gleaming. It was my turn to be held spellbound, for she was dancing, heavily and noisily, in the moccasins of red gold.

CHAPTER IX.

We hurried back across the river, and stopped in the Honolulu to get warm. Cavanaugh was there with Doctor Sidebotham, and looked at me wonderingly as we came in.

"The moccasins are back," I said to him, and he looked up at me with expressionless eyes.

"Where did you see them?"

"Over at Singer's dance. An up-river squaw had them on. They call her the Big Chicken."

"That so? By the way, you're in late to-night, aren't you?"

I explained to him that I had planned to roll blankets on the floor of Windy Jim's cabin.

"Oh, I can beat that," he objected. "Jim's got two good bunks. Kentuck can go with him, and you come over to my cabin. I've two good bunks, and it's cozy. I want to have a talk with you."

My companions agreed, and we bade the others good night, and hurried across the crackling snow to the cabin at the rear of the trading post, which I had never entered. Cavanaugh went in ahead of me, and struck a light. It was from a heavy library lamp, that seemed incongruous, so far from the outer world and its concomitants.

I looked around. One side of the room was literally filled with books, the only open space being a square in the center, where a double window was let in. Everything about the room bespoke the artist. It was divided by a portière made of shotgun wheels and cartridge shells, with pebbles of country rock clutched in with buckskin thongs. A couch was covered with a polar-bear skin; and another skin of the same kind, the most magnificent I have ever seen, formed the rug, which was laid down over curiously woven native matting, stained into patterns. The rafters above were stained to dark brown, and were carved with totem signs.

Beyond the hangings a dresser, evidently from the outside, was littered with rare old silver toilet articles, and I saw at the first glance that they bore an Irish crest in raised gold. In one corner was a baby organ, and I wondered how he had succeeded in importing it all this distance. It was littered with music, and opened on it was a book of exercises, which he saw me staring at.

"Bess," he said. "I used to play a little, and so I give her lessons as best I can. She is very musical. She is about the only person, besides the doctor, that I ever invite here into my privacy, so you see you are honored. I had the bunk built in and fitted so that when Father Barnum comes through he can make this his home. He makes it up this way about once a year."

As he talked in these disjointed sentences, he removed his mackinaw coat and moccasins, and pulled on a pair of worn slippers, and then took my hat and parka, and set a box of cigars on a taboret made from caribou horns.

"You are comfortable," I said, glancing around his quarters.

"Yes, I am by nature a sybarite. Wait. I've a new pair of slippers at your disposal. All fixed, are you? Here, let me give you this other chair. It's a favorite of mine. Gives you that rested feeling."

He lighted a cigar, and suddenly looked straight at me, and said: "I knew the moccasins of gold had been brought back. I know how she came to have them. And I know all of the end. It's not pleasant. You may laugh at me, but I believe the curse still holds good."

He settled himself back farther into his chair, and the light of the lamp behind shadowed his face, but enlivened the silver of his hair. As he talked, he took the cigar from his mouth, and gesticulated with it, watching, sometimes, its little spirals of pale-blue smoke.

"Both Marie Barstow—she that was the foolish little Marie Devinne—and Spider Riggs, whose real name was something else, are dead. They paid the penalty, and Barstow executed them as cruelly as ever any man could conceive. He must have been as mad as any of those who ever went after the red gold. The squaw you saw wearing them was given the name of Mary down at the mission. I've known her and her brother, Constantine, for years. He worked for me two seasons. He doesn't lie. He is more than intelligent. Mary came honestly by the moccasins. He told me so. He told me the story, and I asked him to say nothing more about it, because the less said about the cursed gold the better. I've seen men die like flies in the fall by the side of the trails for less. And there was but little more attention paid to them than as if they were dead flies. There is nothing so heartless as a stampede. So Constantine will never talk."

He got up, and brought out a decanter of brandy, and poured moderate drinks, then settled himself, and resumed:

"Constantine and Mary were coming down from Forty Mile. Marook told him last fall that if he came back here he would give him a lay on that Hunter Creek claim of his, and Constantine came down to work it. His sister's brighter than any squaw I ever met, but she's—well, she's too civilized. It spoils them. They get to know too much. They want too much. Constantine has hard work to control her. Up this side of the flats they heard a shot, and they naturally went to see what it was. It was off on the bank. It was what was left of Spider Riggs. His feet were frozen, and he had not waited to go to sleep in the snow. And I've no prayer for his soul, because he was bad, clean through. Constantine lashed him up in a tree, where the wolves couldn't get at him, and left him there.

"The trail was hard going, and the day was bad. The wind had come up along the river, and you know what that means. About ten miles farther on they were just in time to see something wavering and staggering along the edge of it, and it fell before they got to it. It was Marie. She was wandering in her mind, as her poor feet had wandered through life, so they put up their tent in a clump of trees on the bank, and made camp. They did all they could for her before the end, but she couldn't survive. The cold and the exhaustion had got in their work, and for twelve hours she babbled along about what had taken place, disjointedly, and never had sanity until within the hour she died.

"Partly from what she said then, and

from what they gathered from her delirium, they know what happened. And Constantine came here, troubled, to tell it all to me, when he found out that Sam Barstow was dead, and that he couldn't deliver Marie's last message, which didn't amount to much, being merely: 'Please find Sam, and tell him that Marie, his little Marie, is sorry, so sorry, and tired, so tired, and that she hopes he will forget, and will never again go after the red gold.' That was all. I fancy I can see her as she said it, gasping out her life there in a tent on the Yukon, with the wind howling through the trees and around outside. She paid the price!

"Marie Devinne never loved Sam Barstow. She was fascinated by that Spider Riggs. She had promised to marry him long before Sam went away on that trip to the north with Pitkok, who betrayed the secrets of the old men of his tribe, and led a white man to the place where the gold is red. She was no better nor no worse than any other dance-hall girl in any other camp. She was not nearly so immoral as unmoral, and was what life and men had made her. She was a combination of what was left of the tenderness and sympathy of a woman's nature, and the mercenary woman of the camps, seeking nothing so much as a home stake, and the gold to buy baubles, and silks, and gayety, and entertainment.

"The remnant of good left in her was nearly wiped away under the tutelage of that blackguard Riggs, after she came to this camp and was fascinated by his outward varnish of gentility. He undermined all the good in Marie Devinne as surely as the devil undermines any of us, if he gets us in the right condition. He made her think that all they needed to be married and to go outside and live that other life, was money in plenty, and he made her believe that life was a joke, and that so long as one had money enough, everything went easily.

"Sam Barstow was soured by ill luck. He had starved, and worked, and trailed in this country, frozen, and slaved, and hoped, until everything hardened within him except that one dream, the possession of Marie Devinne. About the last straw with him was when his partner up on Birch Creek carried away all their stake from clean-up and sale that had been cached in the trader's safe, and went out on a steamer, leaving Sam waiting for him on the creek. The man wasn't quite right from that time on, as far as his love of humanity went; for he distrusted nearly every one, save the dance-hall girl.

"He made love to her in his way, and I hoped that he would marry her, and keep on trying, because there was a whole lot of good in Sam Barstow, as I knew him a few years ago—the old Sam. He was much of a man; but he had fallen in love with a heartless little fool, who couldn't understand him any more than a fox could understand a lion. He asked her to marry him, and she twiddled her fingers under his nose and told him she would when he had money enough to take her outside, and let her live like a real lady—whatever that meant in her estimation. She couldn't appreciate the honest love of an honest man, and a clean name, and a forgotten and forgiven past. All that, the cleanliness and decency of life, meant nothing to her. She was playing with him, because she wanted to be the wife of Spider Riggs, ex-race-track tout and tinhorn gambler!

"So Sam Barstow was tempted by Pitkok, who had been tempted by the legend of red gold, and couldn't go after it alone because he couldn't get credit from anybody on earth for an outfit, and wouldn't take the time and trouble to work for it. Pitkok told him about it, and the range of mountains where it was said to be, away up there on the far edge of the tundra, between the strange landmarks, a peak thin as a needle, and by it, on one side, one which looks like a devil's face, and on the other a third that resembles an eagle squatted with his head between his shoulders.

"The sagas know, and have known, for hundreds of years, perhaps, where they were—this spot that is accursed by

God and eschewed by them. Not many of them, it is true, but one of them who did know had told Pitkok, and Pitkok, wanderer, came to regard gold, any man's gold, as the ultimate glory of life, for he had seen how white men struggled, and scraped, and worked, or murdered, for it.

"Barstow and Pitkok met at an unfortunate time, it seems, when the native was ready to sell his secret for an outfit and a half interest in what they might get, and Sam was willing to sell anything, his soul possibly, for Marie Devinne, the little girl of the Horn Spoon hall. So they went away together, and Pitkok didn't come back. He had gone on his last wandering trip, and he, too, had paid the price.

"Barstow returned, and no one knew that he had found it, not even I, with whom he had banked his money before he left—amounting to an even eight thousand dollars in dust at seventeen fifty an ounce, which is what the company allows for up-river gold. But he told Marie, and exaggerated the amount he had brought back. She thought he had a fortune, not appreciating the fact that when a man walks away with about twenty thousand dollars' worth of low-grade gold on his back, he has a mule's load if he wants to travel very many miles. She was one of those who didn't know that it takes a freight car to carry a fortune in that metal, and that the man who says he would be contented with all the gold he could carry doesn't want much!

"It was Riggs' chance. People didn't know it, but he practically owned that table and its bank roll. He leased the privilege. Anything that came across that table was his. He saw that this was his chance to win Sam Barstow's discovery and his savings. He corrupted Marie's last remnant of honesty and self-respect, as men have, from time immemorial, corrupted women—through love. She loved him! She would do anything for him. He made black look white, only they must win, and probably he told her it didn't matter, because Sam could get more gold, and would not miss what they took away from him. So she joined forces with him, and ran to the limit because she loved him, and wanted him, and wanted to get away from it all, and didn't love Sam.

"That night, when Sam played in the Horn Spoon and she kept the cases, he was 'rooked.' Spider Riggs had taught her how, and practiced the signals with her so that the cases wouldn't tabulate the crookedness; but Sam fooled them. He thought the deal was fair, because Marie kept the cases. Instead of playing the fortune they supposed he possessed, he only played, and lost the money he had in my safe. Then his luck turned, devil's luck, as it proved—the luck of the red gold—and he broke Abramsky, who was honest as the day.

"Then he went back to Spider Riggs' table, and Marie was not at the cases, and Spider couldn't work a crooked deal, and the devil's luck held, for he broke Spider Riggs, and went away that night worth about eighteen thousand dollars in money, and when the men who owned the Horn Spoon backed Spider out of sympathy, and because they had a percentage in the game, he broke them, too, and owned that estimable place of gayety—that sodden place of misfortune!

"But Riggs was well named. He was a spider, and with webs broken, he calmly spun new and slimy coils. He talked Marie into marrying Sam, explaining to her that divorces were easily obtained and alimony abundant, and she fell again. She was ready to sacrifice the last thing she had to give for the love of Spider Riggs.

"And Sam, poor fool, blundered on, unseeing, undiscerning, and undismayed. He was happy in that last lap of his course. That girl was an angel to him. No matter what she was to any one else, to him she was the woman of dreams, audacious, impertinent, fascinating wife and companion. Life had not dealt softly with him, and it was a long cry from mud-floored cabins and trying trails and short rations to a home which he regarded as the ultimate splendor of luxury, a wife who was better than any that had ever lived, and

the proprietorship of two great things —the Horn Spoon and the secret of the red gold.

"His fool's paradise was short-lived. He, too, must pay the price! He wanted more luxury, as you know, and went down to Taninaw to buy foolish furnishings and china plates, and carpets, and table luxuries, from the steamboat *Healy* laid up there for the winter. He had money, and wanted to spend it for the foolish Marie."

He paused for a moment, and rested with the tips of his fingers touching before him as he lounged in his chair, and I saw that his eyes were fixed on the ceiling.

"Now I don't know all that took place, of course," he said slowly, "but I fancy I can conjecture it all, and fill in the blanks, from what she told Constantine, and what he heard of her raving. But it seems to me that she began to admire this rough, crude man, who believed in her, and had clean ideas, and would have died for her; but she had not the strength of character to resist the Spider, who was patiently waiting, true to the name, in his outer den. He had not lost touch with her, and his ambitions were unchanged.

"Sam, still blundering and believing, had laid his whole life bare to her without reservation. One can readily understand how she asked him curious questions, for she must have had curiosity. And his mental processes were simple and direct, and she was entitled to as much or more confidence than a partner, for she was his partner for life.

"And so she told Spider Riggs that she knew where the peculiar gold came from, and perhaps gloated over her knowledge, and Spider Riggs saw another lever to lift his aims. Could he but induce the girl who was faltering in her allegiance to him to betray her husband, he could get that secret, so he redoubled his efforts, and added to his intentions, and became more smooth, insinuating, and slimy than ever.

"On that night when Sam Barstow came home, vastly unexpected, and found Spider Riggs there with his wife, the black truth stared him in the face. If ever a man went mad in a minute, it was he. Nothing could palliate the shock.

"Madness lent him endurance. Tired as he was, he drove them out on the trail—the cold, night trail—unceasingly, tied together with a rope, and carrying the red-gold moccasins as their only fortune, for a full twenty-four hours. He gave them neither tent for shelter, nor food! He knew that he was driving them to their death as certainly as he knew that his life was a wreck.

"Riggs was a craven in the last moments after that discovery. He dropped to his knees and cried, as babies cry, and lied, as liars lie, laying the blame for it all on Marie. Poor girl! My sympathies are all with her as she saw that unmitigated poltroon prove his worthlessness, there on his knees, half-clad, begging for his life at her expense, while over them stood a madman, with an unwavering gun in his hand, sternly condemning them to a torturous death. And from what I gather, even as this house of cards proved itself, her pride rallied, and she made no appeal.

"Think of it! For almost twenty-four hours they walked, this desolate trio, until in the end she had fallen so often that Barstow thought it was the end, and left them. Spider Riggs, the delicate, must have had more iron in his blood than she, for he was still on his feet. Once he had been off them, and that was when, after sobbing uselessly, and murmuring appeals to the implacable Sam, he had faced about, and begged to be shot. The madman behind had calmly knocked him down, and said that he wanted to hear no more, or he would cut out his tongue.

"The only mercy he showed him was when he left, and gave Spider Riggs an empty gun, and his insane cunning was displayed by the fact that after he walked a hundred yards down the trail he threw back one cartridge. Just one, mind you, not two, which would have spelled an end to both their miseries. He wanted them to think of that one

cartridge, as they staggered ahead, waiting for hard and painful death. He wanted to prove to her, in the last offering, that the man whom she had loved would be poltroon enough to use it on himself rather than speed her to a merciful and sudden end.

"They unlashed themselves when Sam turned back and began that dreary progress, hating each other; but the final contempt must have crept into her mind when Spider Riggs seized a remnant of food they had secreted, and went away with the pistol. She fell on the trail repeatedly, but that strange after-facility and toughness of feminine endurance asserted itself, as time after time she made a fresh attempt. She clung to life more fervently than she had ever clung to anything else, and was big enough, in the end, to send back a brave message to dead ears! It was her only appeal.

"The foolish Marie was a woman at last, too late, and to me there is a splendor in that end—that uprising, newborn nobility which would not descend to speeding back a curse to the man who had driven her, unforgiving of frailties, to that lonely passage from life on a mat of fir boughs in a wind-swept tent. Of the three she was the most noble, and met her end without whimpering in the consciousness that she had earned it.

"She had but one thing to give her would-be rescuers—the secret of the red gold, and the moccasins made of that gold that had been her temptation downward. And I doubt if that well-meant gift does not prove a mistaken kindness. I wonder!"

He suddenly stood on his feet, smothered the end of his cigar butt in a homemade ash tray, and pointed toward the bed I was to occupy.

"That's yours," he said. "I'm going to turn in. Good night!"

CHAPTER X.

When we went out to the gulch, on the following morning, we overtook a heavily loaded sled, pulled by worn dogs. Toiling along, and floundering here and there in the snow at the side, was a man with the gee pole in one hand, and a rope across his shoulder, dragging to his full strength; and behind, bent far forward, and planting her moccasins heavily on the snow to get solid foothold, was a squaw. We came abreast of them, and discovered that it was Constantine and his sister, Mary, the Big Chicken, taking their outfit up to Marook's claim on Hunter Creek. The girl's face had lost its cheerfulness of the night before, and she looked sullen and discontented. Constantine was grave and steady.

Remembering the story told me by Cavanaugh, I eyed them with much interest, and paused long enough to exchange a few words, and to tell Constantine where there was a short cut which would save him some work.

"Gee! But doesn't the Big Chicken look ugly this mornin'?" Kentucky laughed, after we had passed them. "Don't blame her. If I had gold moccasins, and was a *klootch,* I'd want to dog it a while, instead of slippin' off my glad rags, gettin' into a denim parka, and heavin' myself against a sled."

I wondered if he suspected all that was told by the red gold; but, on thought, was certain that he did not, for I doubted whether even Bessie Wilton was aware of the details.

"I wouldn't mind havin' those golden shoes along about now, myself," he said, with a sigh, and I felt sorry for him, knowing that money alone was all that prevented him from fulfillment of his happiness. My twinge of jealousy returned for an instant, and I had to fight it down.

As we plodded along in the brightness of the morning and the bracing cold, we heard some one swinging through the turn of the trail coming from the creek, and in a minute more a voice shouted: "Hello, there! Is that you, Kentucky? I've been looking for you. You're just the man I want."

It was the prosperous McGraw, who had the best claim on our gulch.

"What's up?" questioned Kentucky hopefully.

"You aren't doing anything, are you, just now?"

"No. Sorry to admit it. Want a good, husky young feller like me?"

"Yes. I want you to do some assessment work for me. I've got two claims on Hunter Creek, and you can do them both. Cavanaugh tells me that a native named Constantine is going to be on the creek with his sister. They've got a cabin there, and when they come maybe you could arrange to get in their cabin and save a tent and big outfit."

"Good! You're on," exclaimed Kentuck, in delight. "And they're on the way out now, with an outfit. I'll go right back with you, and find out about the cabin. You don't mind, do you, Tom?"

"Mind?" I laughed at his boyish question. "No, I'm glad you've struck something. Certainly it's best for you to go back and ask them."

They left me to finish my journey alone, and tell Dan of the reappearance of the gaudy footwear that had been connected with so much of tragedy.

Kentucky was not a laggard. Before the day was over he appeared, pulling a sled with some tools, food, and blankets, and announced that he had made his arrangements with Constantine, and was going over to begin work.

"I'll run over and see you every evening or two," he called back, as he went hurrying on down the trail.

And he kept his promise, for he was in our cabin but three nights later, and threw himself on the spare bunk to smoke and talk. He was in higher spirits, and was amused by his new quarters.

"Funniest mix-up I ever saw," he declared. "The Big Chicken's got a grouch that makes the candles smoky, and I reckon that Constantine's got a mighty big job to keep her from desertin' the ship, and goin' back to the igloos. They don't know I can understand 'em, and so I just sit around and try to look like a fool. And the funniest part of it is that the Hatchet showed up the second day, and he's got the hypnotic eye on the Big Chicken, and Constantine don't like that; but can't just see how to help himself. The Hatchet loves me! Oh, yes! Maybe he thinks I want to win that squaw. And say!"

He suddenly sat up on the edge of the bunk, and bumped his head against the one above it. He rubbed the bruise, but went on, without referring to it:

"I've seen the golden shoes! They're peaches, all right! The Big Chicken showed 'em to me, and Constantine was sore. He says there's a cuss on the gold they're made of; but the Big Chicken thinks it's a right good sort of a cuss, and I agreed with her."

"Wouldn't mind if this claim was cursed with it a while, myself," said Dan gloomily, remembering the fact that we were still without pay dirt, although we had crosscut more than two-thirds of the way across the gulch.

Doubtless he was thinking of all those dependent on the remittances from the Ocean Bank that had failed and left them without means, and cut off from communication with their protector. After that Kentucky's cheerful remarks sounded like chatter, and I was not sorry when he left. It seemed as if that night were the beginning of more afflictions for Dan, for he woke up in the morning with a badly swollen face, and all indications that he would suffer from an abscess on his cheek bone.

"Better go down and see Doctor Sidebotham," I said; but he insisted on working that day and the next, and even the dogs were neglected by him, though they leaped around him for the touch of his caressing hand, and the sound of his caressing voice.

I had heated hot-water bottles, and put them against his swaddled face, and was just preparing to blow out the light, when we heard a sound out in the stillness of the night, where the solitude was so vast that even the fall of snow from a pine bough became a crash. It was some one coming hastily up the trail. We waited for the visitor, who banged at the door, and then opened it. It was Kentucky Smith.

He was breathless as he shut the door behind him, and leaned against it for a moment, then looked around.

"Late, ain't I?" he said. "But I

couldn't wait to tell you all what I heard. Hello! What's the matter with you, Dan? Got toothache?"

My partner nodded, and I explained in words; but Kentucky's sympathy was overcome by his anxiety to explain his errand.

"Say," he blurted out excitedly, "I ran most of the way here to tell you somethin'. You know I told you that the Hatchet, that Sioux, was makin' goo-goo eyes at the Big Chicken, and that Constantine didn't stand for it very well, and that none of 'em knew I understood their lingo? Well, there's big doin's about to come off. Three or four days, I reckon. The Hatchet and the Big Chicken are goin' to gallop off together, and you cain't calculate where! They're goin' after the ground where that sorrel gold comes from! True, I swear it!"

He threw himself on a stool, and Dan forgot his miseries, and lifted himself to his elbow, intent. Kentuck tossed his hat on the bunk, and wiped his forehead, and pulled his blue parka over his head, and smoothed down his hair. He began talking again, pouring out his words in a far more rapid flow than his accustomed drawl, and rolled a cigarette as he talked.

"I don't get all of it, you understand, but I get the run of it—the conversation, I mean. I had been up to fix my fires, because I'm mighty eager to give McGraw somethin' more than assessment work. I want to find somethin' for him, so I'm sinkin' in what seems to be the best place in the draw. The trail around the cabin's soft, because there ain't been many people walkin' over it.

"Just as I came to one side of the cabin, it seemed to me I heard somethin' on the other, and I was right curious. I stood still. The door opened after a minute, and out comes a black shape that I recognized as that fool, Big Chicken. She slips around the corner away from me, and so I just naturally slips around the other. I had an idea Constantine, who is all right, and a good feller, was asleep.

"There's another black shape out there when I pokes my head around, and it was the Hatchet. I pulled back mighty sudden, because they were not more than three feet from me, and I could hear everything they said. As far as I can make out, whoever gave her those moccasins told her where the gold came from, and the Hatchet has talked her into goin' after it. They'd have taken Constantine, but he doesn't like the Hatchet. So they're goin' to leave him. She'd put it up to him before, but he's afraid of the ghosts, and set his foot down, and said she shouldn't go anywhere or tell any one if he could help it."

He paused to roll a cigarette for Dan, and then went on:

"The Big Chicken's some soft on this Hatchet man, because he's different from a Siwash. She's agreed to go with him. They're goin' to pull out. I cain't understand that native way of tellin' days by the full moon; but as near as I can make out, the Hatchet leaves in a day or so for Taninaw. She's to tell Constantine that she's sick of livin' on Hunter Creek, and is goin' down to the village; but she goes right on. She is to meet the Hatchet down by the Ramparts. Then they go to Taninaw, and tell folks they're buck and squaw, all right, lay in some grub, and pull out.

"And they don't go up the Taninaw the way they're to make believe. They start in that direction, then make a big circle and come back on the north side of the Yukon in that little river that comes in about there, and they're to go up to its head, and over the Yukon hills and off north, to where it seems they reckon Sam Barstow found that gold. Now, what do you think of that?"

He paused, with an air of triumph, and Dan lifted himself still higher in his bunk, while I thought of all that was involved.

"You mean that the thing to do is to trail 'em?" Dan mumbled.

"Sure! Get after 'em, and stake the claims next to theirs. They cain't grab it all!"

Dan, holding his hand to his swollen face, looked wistful.

"I'd think over takin' a chance," he said, "if my jaw was better. But pshaw! Tom and me'd be fools! We're bound to get somethin' here, sooner or later. What's the use!"

He settled back into his bunk again, and nestled his aching face against the water bottles. Kentucky looked his disappointment.

"You can't tell anything about the reliability of these native yarns, anyway," Dan added. "If I'd follered every trail of that kind I've heard about since I've been in this country, I'd have been trail-worn to a shadow, and so sore-footed my moccasins wouldn't hold my feet. Of course, Barstow got it somewhere; but nobody can see whether the Big Chicken or anybody else has any idea. And Sam's dead."

It was on the tip of my tongue to tell them what I knew, and the words were fluttering in my mouth, when I checked myself, remembering that Cavanaugh had told me in a confidential mood. I did not share the trader's superstition, nor the Indian belief, that this gold, or any gold taken from the earth, was foredoomed to bring evil on those who found it. I saw in the gruesome tale connected with it merely a history of oversuffering in the case of Bill Wilton, and coincidence in the turgid drama played by Pitkok, Barstow, Marie Devinne, and Spider Riggs.

Gold, being inanimate, might not choose its masters, and on them rested the responsibility for its use. To attempt to trail the Big Chicken and her Sioux lover would be no pygmy's task; but, with our own claim proving fallow, I might have undertaken it had Dan been agreeable. Now it was out of the question, and, moreover, there was nothing but Kentucky's eavesdropping, conjectures, and partial knowledge of the native tongue, to cause consideration.

"Oh, forget all about it," I said. "It might be a chance, but the odds are it would prove a fake. Go home, and go to bed, and make up your mind that if you can find something for McGraw, he'll do better by you than lead you off on a wild-goose chase."

I saw the boyish enthusiasm in Kentuck's eyes die away to a look of disappointment, and he put his hat on his head.

"Mind you, Kentuck," I added, "we're grateful to you for coming over to tell us about this; but we are the singed ducks. We have stampeded too many times. If it goes to anything more certain, there will be time enough for us to join in. How does McGraw's claim look? Any colors, or have you got down to the gravel yet?"

He would not permit me to change the subject, and sat there for an hour offering arguments in favor of his hope. And he went away dejected because we had not immediately enthused with him, and grasped what he believed to be an opportunity. In five minutes after he left, our cabin was dark and still, and Dan, worn out from work and two restless nights, was asleep, while I, on my back, and with wide eyes, stared at the window opening, whose little squares, befogged by the outer frost, looked like pallid sheets stuck upon the wall.

But Dan could bear the pain no longer, and even his fortitude gave way, when on the following morning he arose from his bunk.

"I think," he grumbled, "that I'll have to go down to the camp and see the doctor. That means stayin' down there for two or three days, I suppose, while he opens this thing up, and drains it. You won't mind, will you, Tom?"

"You go ahead," I retorted. "I'll keep things going ahead. That is what I asked you to do in the first place. And you stay down there until that jaw of yours is well, and don't worry about the claim. I'll keep on drifting and sinking, and will dump the waste back into the drifts we know are no good. I can't see any utility in making a big waste dump."

I watched him as he trudged off down the trail with his parka hood muffled, until his head looked inordinately large, waved my hand in response to his parting salute, and did not realize that it was to be long weeks before I should see him again, and that I was to suffer as men rarely suffer before I again felt

the clasp of his sturdy and faithful hand.

CHAPTER XI.

In the far Northern country, in the depressing days of winter, there is something in being alone, when one is despondent, that augments all one's melancholy. Not a living thing had been up, down, or around me all day. The dogs felt my mood, and were not companionable. Even the "camp robber," or Canadian blue jay, that sometimes favored me with his presence, had vanished, and I was left alone to brood.

Nor am I ashamed to say that the face of Elizabeth Wilton was in my memory most of the hours, and that she appeared as an unattainable apparition, a source of bitter regret. Life summed itself in this, that I was to go hungry for love, and that all I could hope for was money, a paltry success. And of that there was none in sight, for our claim was still a discouraging blank.

I sometimes fancy that the drunkard, or drinking man, has his recompense; for when I sat alone in my cabin that long winter evening, I thought that I should welcome the oblivion of bestial drunkenness! Anything to forget!

I could not interest myself in the book loaned me by Cavanaugh, and blew out my light and went to bed. Sleep came quickly as a boon. I was awakened by a terrific thumping at the door.

"Come in," I called, sitting up, and wondering who it could be, and how long I had slept.

It opened, and outlined against the stars of the background stood some one, who answered: "Is that you, Tom?"

"Yes, Kentuck," I replied, recognizing his voice. "Light the candle. You know where it is. What is it?"

"They've gone," he said. "It must be that I didn't quite understand the time set. The Big Chicken and the Hatchet, I mean. Constantine and she had a row down at the camp to-day, and he came home alone. To-night one of the natives from across the river came up to a claim above, and stopped to tell Constantine that she had sent word she was going with friends to visit some relatives in Taninaw. Constantine went into a rage, and reckoned she could go and be hanged, for all of him; but I knew what it meant.

"If we're to take a try at finding where they've headed for, and get in and stake some of that gold they all talk about, we've got to get action to-night. We could cut across from here, and get to Taninaw not more than a day behind them. We'd save the time of going around the camp there by going to that little stream above it, direct. And there we ought to find their trail. I hate to lose the chance. It means a lot to me. Won't you come with me?"

I had crawled out of my bunk as he talked, and pulled on my trousers, and sat there on the edge thinking. He wanted to go to gain wealth to marry Elizabeth Wilton, the girl I loved. I knew that, and yet it influenced my decision but little. The glamour of gain was not all, either, but rather the fact that I was sick of life as it had been, and also that there was Dan to consider. Poor old Dan, with his cares and worries, eating his heart out because he could not take care of those others outside! And Dan was all man. If by chance I could make this expedition, and meet with success, it would mean more to Dan than anything in the world. But there were the discomforts and fatigues of what might prove to be a long, hard trail, vicissitudes, perhaps starvation and death!

I walked to the door and threw it open, and looked out into the night, while Kentuck sat watching me, anxiously waiting for my decision. Off in the north the aurora was beginning to rise above the trees on the crest of the mountains, shining in streamers of gold, fluttering, waving, and spreading across to consume the sky. The cold was so intense that I hurriedly drew back, and closed the door, and stood with my back against it, looking at Kentuck. The bunk was warm and comfortable, after all; but to lie soft meant an opportunity lost. The reckless mood invaded me again, and I took a step toward him.

"Yes," I said. "I'll go!"

He threw his hat up, and shouted.

"Go out and pull the sled down off the roof," I said, "and look over the dog harness you'll find hanging in the cache at the side of the door. Then we'll get the grub together, put the dogs in, and pull out. What time does it say there on the clock? Ten? Well, we should be away from here by eleven, and the moon rises just about that time, and is in the full."

I began selecting the clothing I should want, extra moccasins, and mittens and socks, and dragged the fur robe from the bottom layer in my bunk. I had begun to wrap the bacon and beans and oatmeal into their separate sacks by the time he had finished his last repairs on the harness. I took my snowshoes from the wall, and threw Dan's to him, and told him to look at the lashings, then sat down and wrote a note to my partner:

Dear Dan: The Sioux and the girl have pulled out, and Kentuck and I are going to try to follow them and stake claims on that ground, wherever it may be. Don't worry over me, because I'll turn up sooner or later. Get some one to do that assessment work that Kentucky started over on McGraw's claim, and whatever you do, don't let any one know where we have gone. Better let them think we've headed up to Goldpan to do some assessment work, because I think we'll be back shortly. I've taken your rifle and cartridges, because mine are too heavy. We're traveling light. Yours as ever,

Tom.

We dragged the old tarpaulin out for the sled, threw in the little trail tent and trail stove, the frying pan, coffeepot, and tin kettle, and I put in an extra pair of blankets and some dry gear for Kentuck, then we lashed it down on the sled with the dog fish piled on top, the ax and the rifle convenient, and shut the cabin door.

The dogs came reluctantly, poor brutes! They gave the trail bark of the wilderness when they felt the harness bands across their breasts, and stood wagging their tails and waiting. I took a last look in the cabin, and pulled the door shut, and we headed away in the chill, bright night, down the cañon, which was in shadow, despite the moon on the white peaks above.

We were off on the quest, and traveled silently and swiftly away up the stream from whose headwaters we purposed to cross the divide, and head the fugitive Sioux and Mary, who had the secret, passed down from mouth to mouth, all forever speechless in death.

We were lighter than we had thought, and made good progress, inasmuch as Kentuck knew the way, and ran ahead of the dogs on his snowshoes without ever wavering, while I held the sled handles behind. Malicula, the leader, strained forward as if enjoying the chase, and scenting in it something of the hereditary, for he was a half-blood wolf. The others, with brushes erect, and curled over their backs, strung out behind him, trotting steadily at a pace that ate up the miles. At three o'clock we halted, and decided to make a quick camp for the night at a place where some native hunting party had left a comfortable wikiup with its poles between three favorable trees, its lean-to of thick, sheltering brush, and its mat of fir boughs inside to give rest to our weariness.

We altered our plans the next day, and decided to go into Taninaw, because we found that we would be short of dog fish if the chase proved prolonged, and on them depended our comfort and speed. Moreover, I was anxious to know if we would hear anything of our quarry at that point. So it was that we pulled up to the old A. C. trading post, and carelessly laid in more supplies before making inquiries. The trader proved garrulous, and volunteered the information we wanted, thus saving us questions.

"You're the first white men down from Neucloviat in quite a while," he said. "Yes, the first since poor old Sam Barstow came down. What's that the natives say about him bein' dead?"

I confirmed that mysterious interchange of news which travels so incredibly fast in Alaska, and the trader shook his head. As he weighed out our dog fish he asked questions about the camp, and whether it was "makin' good" or not, and we answered him noncommittally.

"They was a funny-lookin' buck with a tin tooth in here yesterday I never saw before," he said, "and he told me the camp wa'n't much. He had that Mary, who used to be down at Holy Cross, with him. The big *klootch* that was old Sarta's daughter. They were headin' off up the Taninaw on a huntin' trip. He laid in quite a bunch of dog feed. Seemed to have the dust, and, by the way, it was the funniest lookin' stuff I ever saw. Looked as if it had been hammered. I wouldn't have took it if it hadn't been the same kind that Sam paid for the stuff he bought down here. It don't look like the gold from Birch, any more than that does like the brassy stuff they git out at Klondike. Here's some of it."

He poured some beaten nuggets into the blower, and held them toward us. I picked one up, and looked at it. It was that peculiar red, and I knew it had been perforated. Mary had torn it from the moccasins of gold to pay their bill. The proof was there in my hand that the Hatchet and Constantine's sister had really been there at the post, and that Kentuck must have understood much of what they said.

"When did you say they were here?" I asked.

The trader thought a while, and then said that it was "day before yistaday."

His answer caused Kentuck and me to exchange glances. They were traveling faster than we had thought they could. We must do something to improve our speed. But it would not do to show that we had any special object.

"We're thinking of going over to Tramway Bar, or in that direction," I said, "and we ought to have more dogs. We've got four, but we could use six or eight. Know of any?"

He ruminated for a while, and then said he thought he could help us out. This necessitated more dog feed, and a delay. We went over our outfit, ounce by ounce, cutting down here and increasing there, as only those who have traveled in that country where weight is measured by ounces rather than pounds, can understand. And it was two o'clock in the afternoon when, with everything complete, and three additional dogs, we pulled away from Taninaw, and headed for the small stream up which we were to go.

We had not found any sign of their trail when we made camp that night, and, the next morning at daybreak, we were again on the way. At noon we were beginning to lose faith, but we discovered lines leading down to the bed of the creek. We went ahead of the dogs, and examined them carefully. The snow told the story. It was the Sioux and a squaw. The lines of the man's feet were straight, with the toes a little turned in, and one foot planted squarely in front of the other, the unquestionable stride of the plains Indian, while the woman's footprints showed spread, and small, and rounded, the footprint of the Alaskan native.

"Got 'em!" said Kentucky, straightening himself.

I stooped over, and examined the snow, trying to form some conclusion of the number of their dogs, and how long they had preceded us along that winding, white way. It seemed to us that they were fully twenty-four hours ahead, and we resumed our progress. The new dogs were ill fed compared with ours, and were reluctant to work with their new teammates, and fearful of their new masters. They traveled with heads turned back frequently, and fearful eyes, which led me to believe that their former owners had been free with the lash. It would take them time to appreciate white drivers. Kentucky, who was in the lead, threw up his hand, and we came to a place where the Hatchet and Mary had evidently halted for tea.

"Had a fire over there, you see," said Kentuck, striding off to the side, with me at his heels. We found round spots on the snow, indicating that they had five dogs, so felt safe on the score of speed, unless they had remarkable animals. We doubted if they would prove equal to four of ours, at least, for of these two were from that splendid racing stock which is bred for speed down around Nushagak, on Bristol Bay, and our leader was a wolf whelp.

"Yes," I said, kicking over the charred sticks, "they must be at least twenty-four hours ahead of us, so we needn't be afraid of running into them. That is good. Now for a long straight-away!"

For three hours more we went rapidly ahead, and then, as I happened to be in the lead, I met with a surprise. Again we stopped, and Kentucky came forward to my side. I pointed at the snow tracks. Another sled had come down from the bank above, taken the trail, and was following in the tracks of the Sioux and his companion.

"What do you suppose that means?" we asked each other, looking up with a sudden suspicion.

"You don't reckon somebody else is onto them, and joined in the chase, do you?" asked Kentuck, in a tone of annoyance.

I shook my head in perplexity, and back-tracked over the new trail. It had followed along the bank above for some distance, as if afraid to venture out on the stream until certain that those ahead were well out of the way, and its progress had been leisurely. We went back some distance, and found where the newcomers had paused to rest, or observe, and here the signs were more plentiful.

"White men," said Kentuck. "See the arches of the insteps? Here!"

I was not so sure, for the moccasins made it hard reading; but there were certain lines about the insteps that indicated less pressure, and in one place I thought I could discern seams which would indicate that the moccasins were really Canadian shoe packs, all of which must be brought down from Dawson when they come to our section of the country, and were therefore rare.

We found a cigarette stub, which rather confirmed our surmise that they must be white men, for the paper was different from that used by the natives where we were, and unobtainable either in Taninaw or Neucloviat.

I crumbled some of the tobacco into my palm, and decided it was the old, familiar blackstrap, which told us nothing; but of one feature we were convinced—the new outfit was probably but a few hours behind the one in the lead, and was going with caution.

We turned back toward the bank, and I heard Kentuck give a sudden sharp yell: "Here! Come back here!" and then a whistle.

I ran to rejoin him, but he had started out on the trail, and I looked below. At that point the stream was straight for long distance, and I saw, almost at the end of the stretch, a black shape hurrying faster as the sound of Kentuck's voice reached his ears. One of our new dogs had chewed himself loose from his harness in our absence, and was heading back for his village, a full day behind. It was our first loss, and it seemed like a calamity, coming at that inopportune time.

I was a more experienced dog man that Kentucky, so left him with the sled, and ran after the fugitive for more than two miles, calling wheedlingly, and endeavoring to win his attention; but whenever I approached he would look back over his shoulder, and quicken his trot to the long, swinging lope that would speedily carry him hundreds of yards into the lead, and at last, disgusted and angry, I gave it up, and made my way back to where Kentucky, deciding that I would be gone a long time, had begun making camp on the river bank. Already he had the tent across its rope between the trees, and pegged down over the smooth, white snow, and when I arrived was carrying the dunnage up to it.

"Too fast for you, eh?" he called down to me. "I was afraid of it. But we'll get along."

There was optimism in his voice, and I was compelled to try to feel it. The darkness was coming swiftly, and by the time I had taken out the dogs, and as a precautionary measure chained the other new purchases, it was black. Everything about the day had been unsatisfactory, and those ahead of us must have gained many miles. All we could hope for now would be steady weather, so that their trails might not be obliterated.

"Don't be blue," Kentuck said to me

as his last words, yawning sleepily. "These new fellers maybe aren't followin' that other trail at all, but just happened to be goin' the same way."

I hoped so, but doubted it.

CHAPTER XII.

Before the daylight was strong we had broken camp, and were again going forward, and always we could discern, in the dim light, that there were two trails ahead of us. The stars paled at last, and the white glow was stronger, making everything distinct. My fears that the second sled was in pursuit of the first were proven, now that we could see more plainly; for at intervals, when we came to abrupt bends of the rapidly narrowing stream, we would find those distinct letterings in the snow that told that before the pursuers had ventured around a bend one of them had walked cautiously to the outer edge and looked ahead. It was certain that they were closer to the Hatchet than we were to them, and that they feared to surprise him.

We began to admit that we were not alone in the chase, and had the sense of lively speculation as to who these others were, and how they had learned of the flight. Only, as the trail led on and on, we were not certain whether the footmarks were those of natives or white men.

"Maybe it is Constantine," I said once to Kentucky. "Perhaps he is following his sister, and proposes to bring her back."

"Might be," answered Kentucky. "He's an odd sort of a stick. But if he followed it wouldn't be to bring the Hatchet back! You can bet on that. The Hatchet would be left on the trail for good and all. That Constantine is a chap I wouldn't want for an enemy."

He stood for a while, and then exclaimed: "By jingo, Tom, I'll bet it is him! He's changed his mind, and he's made it up now to go after 'em. He can mush like the devil, Constantine can. I gathered some talk he handed her about some other native down in the village who wanted her, and was of her own tribe, and it may be that Mister Sioux-man has got a pair of bloodhounds on his trail, just waitin' till he gets far enough away to make it safe, and that then, some nice evening—ping! Down he goes, with one of those H. B. slugs through him. Kicks a few, and—the Hatchet never comes back."

I began to think that possibly Kentuck's surmise might be right; but on the trail one has time for many speculations and many thoughts. That is, I had as many as Kentucky would allow me, for of all the trail mates I had ever had, he was the most cheerful and unfailing. Those who know will bear me out when I say that an Alaskan trail is the place to learn men. There the soul is bared. In civilization a man may live forever under a mask, but the trail strips it from him as if it were gauze, and he is himself, and those with him know that he is naked in soul and disposition.

That eminent sage of the frontier, long since dead, discoverer of Eldorado Creek, in Klondike, Elihu Whipple, was wont to say: "You kin tell what a man is when you've eat a sack of flour with him; but with some men it only takes a half a sack." And the diminishing sack with Kentucky Smith each day proved him more of a man than I had thought. He began to loom colossal with his untiring energy, his unfailing cheerfulness, his persistent attempt to do more than his share.

We had expected to overtake, or at least come within sound of, our quarry within two or three days, for we were driving the dogs to their utmost; but the two days passed, then stretched on into ten, with ever-recurring monotony. We had swung to the westward, and crossed the Koyukuk far below where we knew there was an Indian village, and were now heading toward the northwest, with its piled-up hills, its bleak flats, its timber found only in belts. And ill luck appeared to travel with us, gauntly trailing beside our sled.

The second blow came when one of the new dogs sickened, until, abandoning hope for him, we had to put him out of his misery. We could not under-

stand his malady, unless it came from overwork. The other dog followed him within a few days, and we began to fear that it was pneumonia. Each dog out of the harness meant, notwithstanding the constantly diminishing load, more wearisome labor.

We traveled longer hours, and slept less to offset that loss, still confident that sooner or later the long trail must end, and thanked Heaven that the cold was so intense, and the winter so still; that the trails ahead, constantly leading us farther into the solitudes, were not blinded.

Some days we thought we must have gained, then would come others when we were discouraged and surmised that we were losing in this tireless race. And always, ahead of us, were two trails. Added to this was another fear, that our food would give out. Already the dogs had been reduced to half rations, and to their ravenous jaws were flung but a half fish a day, while we, too, were measuring each flake of oatmeal, and each scrap of bacon.

We lost another day, but on looking back I think it saved our lives. It was the day when the dogs refused to follow the trail, and gave the long, wolf-hunting cry, and we knew that game was somewhere within scent, coming down the wind. We took a chance, and muzzled them, and I left Kentucky to make camp and wait, while I passed off into that slow-moving breeze with nothing but my rifle. And, as if Heaven had spared us, I killed a moose. I made my way back to the camp, and we moved it to the new-sent relief, where we froze all of the meat that we could carry in strips, fed the dogs to repletion, and prepared to make up for lost distance with this surplus energy; but we had lost a day.

A day later, on the trail, we found a dead dog, waiting for the wolves, perhaps. And the next day another left to die in misery, staggering along, and calling to us, and humanity made us execute him. We had begun to fear starvation, in that land of unreality, and Kentucky turned back and picked up the gaunt body.

"I think," he said, "that we'd better tie him up in a tree somewhere."

I looked into his eyes, and understood. He, too, had thought of the end, of what might be the distress of that homeward trail; but he was unflinching.

"Maybe it is best to be on the safe side," I replied, and we lashed the poor victim high up in the limbs of a tree, with a sacrificed piece of sled lashing, and went on, wondering whether that poor, worked-out body might not become our goal when other food was gone.

On the next day we trailed more dismally, for the cold had clung to our hearts, and we moved speechlessly, rested speechlessly, and were tired of peering ahead to see nothing but the two trails leading away over the white and cruel snow. We entered a patch of scrubby timber as the afternoon advanced, and now those persistent marks of two sleds wound in and out among trees, the heaviest growth we had seen for days.

Suddenly Malicula lifted his head, which had been drooping, and tugged at his harness, then gave a long wail, and plunged forward more recklessly. Alarmed, I ran back, and caught and stopped him.

"We're up to them, or else it's a hunting party," I said to Kentucky. "Something's in the wind, and it must be a camp, or the dogs wouldn't act this way. I know them. Go on carefully, and see what it is, while I hold them."

I pulled them over until the brace under the nose of the sled was wedged against the stump of a fallen tree, and waited. The dogs quieted, and, glad of a chance to rest, laid down in their harnesses, with their noses on their paws, huddled together, regardless of snarls, and seeking one another's warmth. Almost an hour passed, and I was trudging backward and forward, and threshing my arms to keep my blood in circulation, when Kentucky returned.

"I cain't make it out," he said, with a serious face, and approaching close before he spoke, as if still fearful, in all that terrific waste, of being over-

heard. "There's a dog tent up ahead, and smoke coming from the pipe, and a man singing, as if he were about drunk. There ain't no dogs, because I went close enough to see that, and, besides, nothin' barked. Let's drive a little farther, then tie our dogs, and go and have a look."

"But what was the man singing?" I asked, puzzled by his story.

"Singin'? Oh, you mean the tune, or language? I don't know. I couldn't make out."

I thought for a few moments, and then made a resolution.

"We will go straight through," I said. "Because, if it's a hunting party, it's good for us—unless they are starving—our grub is running low. It can't be the Sioux, because he wouldn't sing. If it is Constantine, he would let us travel with him. We've nothing to lose, and everything to gain. Besides, it's about time to camp."

"Bully for you," answered Kentucky, with his usual cheerfulness. "Hey, get up there till we get this harness straightened out!" he addressed the dogs, as he stirred them from their rest.

They started forward again eagerly, with their noses in the air, and barking, as if smelling the smoke of a camp; but when we were closer to it Malicula suddenly began to slacken on his rope, and his ruff was raised, and he turned and looked at me, whining. Even as I started toward him he raised his white throat and broad, gray wolf head into the air, and sent forth a melancholy howl that sent shivers creeping up and down my spine.

"Now, what do you suppose made him do that?" Kentuck shouted, as the other dogs joined the wailing chorus.

"I'm afraid," I said, "that there's something wrong up there. Come back and take the handles."

I went forward, and patted the leader with a reassuring caress, and he looked up at me with his intelligent eyes, and followed when I spoke to him. The team straightened out, and the sled surged forward slowly, as I led the way. I came to an open spot across which the two white trails led, and saw, not more than a hundred feet away, in the gloom of the day, the squat shape of a prospector's tent thrown between two trees. The birches and firs stood there denuded, like an oasis on the borders of a far-flung spread of white beyond, leading up to a low hill. It was true that smoke was crawling laggardly upward, and a droning voice was wailing undistinguishable words. The dogs pulled back, and I urged them forward. The voice went on monotonously, and as I came closer I could hear nothing but a singsong, without language or meaning.

"Hello!" I shouted, to announce our coming, and listened. The singsong did not cease, but continued as steadily as before. I looked back at Kentuck, and we walked forward together, leaving the dogs huddled on the trail, with the nose of the sled wedged against the base of a tree, so they could not overturn it or escape.

Again we called at the outside of the tent, but without eliciting response or cessation of the song. We opened the tent fly, which had been loosely lashed, and looked inside. Resting on his back beneath his blankets, and with his hands under his head, was a white man. We entered, and I looked down into his eyes. Apparently he was delirious, and perhaps dying.

"Don't you know who it is?" whispered Kentuck in my ear, as if fearing to stop that chant.

"No," I whispered back, my voice sounding loud and harsh in that stillness, broken only by the humming of the man in the blankets.

"It's Sparhawk, the feller we saw at Singer's dance. Somethin's the matter with him."

I leaned over, and called his name, and after a time he stared back at me, became silent, and then rolled over on his side, and feebly put another small stick of wood into the stove, as if the habit of winter trails and camps had survived his reason—an automatic action instilled in men when life depends on heat. I dragged from my pocket my brandy flask, kept for emergencies only, and put it to his lips. I

had to drag it away from him, lest he empty it. It appeared to revive him. He rolled over to one elbow, and his eyes lost their strange, uncanny glare.

"Grub!" he said. "For God's sake give me somethin' to eat. I've lived on raw oatmeal—years—years and—— Where's Royce? Oh, yes, I recollect now. Who are you? Seems like I know you. You ain't——"

"I am the man you saw at Singer's dance," I said, speaking loudly, as if believing I must shout to make him understood. "What's the matter with you?"

He turned over again, and then fell back, as if exhausted, on his blankets, and asked for food, his reiterated "Grub! Grub!" sounding painfully insistent.

I looked around the little tent. It was littered everywhere in confusion, as if in his illness Sparhawk had rifled it, and stolen from himself. He had subsided now, and lay there with his eyes closed in a ghastly way, with the whites showing, as if physical strength were insufficient to close them.

I turned with Kentucky, and hurried outside. We took the lashings off the sled in haste, and I went back into the tent with a stew kettle and a strip of the precious frozen moose meat in my hand. The wood was almost exhausted, and Sparhawk still lay with his eyes closed in that same half-dead way. I feared for an instant that he was dead, and leaned over to catch his faint breathing. He did not look like the strong man I had seen that night at the squaw dance. I wondered what could have brought him to this, for it scarcely seemed that starvation alone could have been so deadly. I feared that he was dying, and hastened my preparations, through which he slept in that same inert way.

I heard Kentuck having trouble with the dogs.

"Hang it all!" he said, "they're afraid of somethin'. What shall I do with 'em? Tie 'em up?"

"Yes," I called back softly, and heard him go about this task, then the ring of his ax as he felled a tree for fuel.

"Feed the dogs," I called, "and maybe they'll get over it. And give them a fish each to-night, so they'll feel better."

"Good medicine," I heard his response.

Then I aroused Sparhawk and poured the steaming broth down his throat as I lifted him up with a hand behind his shoulders. I gave him all I dared, then laid him back on the blankets, and he again went to sleep. I went outside, and carried in our supplies, dropping to my knees inside the tent, and hungry, and wondering. The dogs, too tired to utter further protest, and too happy to find such an abundant meal, were smelling around the snow for last fragments of frozen fish. Kentucky came in with the blankets, and whispered, as if fearing to arouse the sleeper: "What's he got to say?"

I shook my head, and threw the bacon in the pan, and stirred the flapjack batter, preparatory to making our bread supply. Kentuck sat there, staring at the recumbent Sparhawk for a time, then went out and filled the pan with snow, and put it where it could melt. I heard him pass outside, and go from dog to dog with a friendly word, as if they were still nervous, then wash his hands in snow torn from the bank around the foot of the tent. The candle, stuck in a crotched stick, flared brighter, and I poured the first batter in the frying pan, and watched it come to a brown before flipping and turning it.

Kentucky entered, and piled some of his newly cut wood over the tent fly to hold it down, and at my suggestive nod picked up the first pancake and strips of bacon, and rolled them into a convenient handful. He ate solemnly and silently, staring thoughtfully at Sparhawk, who still slept. I lifted the Cœur d'Alener's head, and again held the broth to his lips. This time it was stronger; but he swallowed greedily, and then, without word or look, fell asleep.

We had finished our meal, seen to it that the dogs were asleep, and washed out our cooking utensils before Sparhawk awoke. Then he suddenly tried to sit up, and fell back, clutching his side. The strength of his delirium had

deserted him, and he lay there staring at us, but with sane eyes.

"How did you get here?" he croaked feebly.

"Over the trail," Kentuck answered, with an assumption of cheerfulness.

Sparhawk appeared to be trying to remember.

"We're north, ain't we? A long ways from anywhere?"

"We are," I answered. "We've been following what we think must have been your trail."

Again he lay quiet for a moment, and then said: "And the Hatchet's?"

"I suppose so."

The pause was longer this time, and he appeared to be thinking over something. I thought it best to give him more of the broth, which had now become thick and nourishing, and he weakly let me lift him up, and hold it to his lips. It seemed to strengthen him somewhat, and his eyes appeared more thoughtful.

"You know where he's headin' for, then?"

I nodded my head, as did Kentuck.

"Well, then you know that he's after the red gold. I've been—I've been goin' out for so long that I lost count of the days. I can't make it. I'm a goner. I'm goin' to cash in. Maybe I'd best tell you how it happened. The Hatchet got me. Come over here and look."

He clawed with his emaciated hands at the blankets, and I pulled them down, to draw back, shocked. His whole shoulder was crudely swathed, but the stained bandages had fallen away, and been displaced in that instinctive effort to keep alive, maintained through his delirium, and a gaping wound was exposed, such as that made by a heavy, slow-moving bullet when its force has been almost expended. It led through the upper part of his lung, as nearly as I could judge, and was a frightful hole.

"The Hatchet gave me that," he said. "No use tryin' to fix it up! I'm a goner. Just give me some more of that soup."

Again I held the kettle to his lips, and he drained it greedily, feverishly. He would have talked then, but I made him keep quiet, and tried to dress his wound as best I might, athough he constantly assured me that it was a useless ministration. But it had this effect, that he went to sleep, exhausted, before I had finished, and we laid out our blankets and did likewise, without his having said anything more. Only now and then, through the night, the dogs howled as if the air were filled with spirits of the dead.

CHAPTER XIII.

"What time is it now?"

Sparhawk's voice, feeble and hoarse, aroused us. It was not daylight, and I struck a match, and looked at my watch. It was nearly eight o'clock in the morning. I hastily crawled from my warm robe, and reached for the kindling, and thrust it into the little stove, and set fire to it. It was bitterly, bitingly cold, with that dead still cold that seems almost to stab.

"I didn't want you to get up on my account," Sparhawk went on, in his labored voice, "but I jest wanted to know the time. I've been thinkin' a lot."

"Well, suppose you try to go to sleep again," I said. "It will be warmer in a minute or two, and I'll get that broth working, and wake you when it is good and hot."

"No use," he said; but, as if reassured by my friendly presence, and comforted by the warmth so quickly making the little tent comfortable, he was soon sleeping again, and I cautiously made preparations for breakfast.

Kentucky, after turning restlessly to get his face away from the light of the candle, began snoring. I went outside the tent, where the stars were still shining, and the dogs, as if tired by their night of restlessness, were now mere black spots in the holes which Kentuck had scooped for them in the snow. I did not arouse Kentuck until the breakfast was ready, for I surmised that we should be compelled to lay up here for mere humanity's sake, until Sparhawk was better, alive or dead. It was hard that we should have come so far to such an unfortunate end, spelling failure,

probably; for one to pass on in such a crisis as this must have a heart of stone. And the food! It was getting scarcer by so many pounds each day.

We finished our breakfast, and fed the dogs, and it was daylight before Sparhawk awoke. I gave him the steaming broth again, and he made a feeble effort to smoke, but it was the effort of the mind trying to resume habit, and he soon tossed the cigarette to one side. He looked up at us, and I saw that his eyes had even a less virile fire than on the night before. The man was dying, and he knew it, and faced it.

"Any wolf signs?" he suddenly asked.

"Why, no. None that we have seen," Kentuck answered.

"And it ain't snowed none since—since I've been here?"

"No, the trails are still clear and sharp."

"Then I want you to get 'em and bury 'em. That is, put 'em up in the trees where the wolves can't get 'em," he said, and Kentuck and I stared at him, wondering if his mind had been delivered to delirium.

"Who do you mean?" I asked, bending forward, and looking at him.

"Royce, my pardner, and that squaw, Mary."

We were on our knees now, and looking at him open-mouthed.

"Yes, they're dead," he added. "You'll find Royce just out at the edge of this patch of trees, on the north side. Then, farther to the east, I think you'll find her. Both shot. Go and see, won't you? I could rest better, it seems to me, knowin' that they've been—been cared for. They've been askin' me to see to it, when I was here alone, goin' out and starvin' because I didn't have strength to do more than grab raw oatmeal and bacon, and put on a little more of the wood. Royce was always great for cuttin' wood. He always piled enough up in each camp to last a week. I owe him that much."

We hurried out of the tent after refilling the stove to its capacity, and made our way toward the northern part of the timber. The dogs began to howl again, that same unearthly call of requiem. We had not far to look. There were tracks where men had run backward and forward, as if dodging behind trees, two freshly cut stumps where Royce had cut wood, and then we found his body. It was doubled up behind a tree, with the face in the snow, with a rifle lying beside it. He had two bullet wounds, as we could make out from the stains on the snow, and such examination as could be made of him under conditions.

"Let's get him into the crotch of a tree," Kentuck said softly, and we adopted that primitive method, in the bitter cold, of giving him the most fitting tomb we could master. We carried him far away from the camp where he had died, however, as we did not know how long we might be there. Three of the dogs howled dismally as we passed them, but the fourth lay still and inert, lifting a slow head, and running out a tongue that was not red. Even in that moment of gruesomeness, I noticed it with a sinking of the heart, for it meant that another dog, one of my original lot, was doomed; but I said nothing to Kentucky as we lifted that frozen body up into the branches after emptying the pockets, lashed it to the limbs laid in the boughs, and left it to its rest.

"He said to the east," Kentuck muttered, as we retraced our steps. "I wonder how it all happened! Poor girl! The 'Big Chicken' I called her in a joke. Now I must call her Mary. It seems more fitting."

We began circling along the outer edge of the trees, seeking, yet dreading to find, that second relic of a tragedy which we could not understand. She was there, laid out on the snow, with her arms folded; but, to our surprise, a breastwork of fallen trees, almost impregnable, had been barricaded across her form to protect her from the ravages of beasts. We tore them away, and spent an hour constructing such a rest as we could between the trees, and then went back to the tent, and found a blanket, in which we bound her body as we lifted her up to that crude sepulcher. Her face was unmarred, and her eyes were closed. She had been shot from

behind, and death must have been instantaneous. For this at least we were glad that she had passed without suffering; but we wondered why or how.

"I'm goin' to do one thing more," Kentuck said softly, "before we leave here. I'm goin' to make a cross for her. You see, I knew her, and she was Constantine's sister. He'd like it better if he knew that she was put to rest like a Christian; like some one who had been to school at Holy Cross Mission."

I agreed with him, and we cut two saplings that we could take into the tent, thaw, and peel, for that humble headmark of the young woman who had paid her life for the red gold. I do not think we felt as much sympathy for Royce, of whose antecedents we had heard nothing creditable, and of whose end we were still unaware. But it did seem hard that this Indian girl should have delivered her life so uselessly, when but a few weeks before we had seen her dancing vainly with the gaudy moccasins in a smoke-filled hut back in the camp. The camp! That was hundreds of miles away, and now seemed the heart of civilization fully developed!

It was after noon by the time we had performed these simple services for the dead, and we went back to the tent, and warmed water for our hands, and piled more fuel in the stove, which, from time to time, we had replenished.

"You—you put 'em away? Put 'em away right, did you? I heard your axes." Sparhawk rolled his head feebly toward me and asked.

"Yes. In the very best way we could."

"I'm glad. I think it makes it easier for me. And—say—you'll do as much for me?"

"If we have to; but, pshaw! You haven't left us yet! Brace up."

"Oh, what's the use in your tryin' to con me? I know! I'm 'most in. You can go to cuttin' the poles now. It won't bother me. I'm ready to go. The game's over."

In the face of that brave submission I could not dissemble with false, encouraging words, for I knew, as well as did he, that it was a matter of but a few hours. He did not say anything more until we had made our meal, and I had examined and done what I could for the stricken dog. But that loss to ourselves, vital as it was, was forgotten in the recollection of the graver tragedies which we had brought to a close. Sparhawk recurred to it himself, and all the time his strength was rapidly failing.

"A buck up at Fort Hamlin told me and Royce about this red gold and its cuss," he said, looking at me as I sat beside him. "We came down to Neucloviat, hopin' to find out somethin' about it. Then we heard that Barstow was dead, and about give up. Mary and her brother comes back. She shows up with the moccasins with the nuggets on 'em, and she tells Royce that the woman that dies told her what Barstow had said about his findin' the gold, and where it was; but she won't tell Royce. He plans to marry her, but along comes this Hatchet."

He twisted in his blankets with pain, and I tried to make him more comfortable; but he was querulous, and wanted to finish his story. Perhaps as a vindication of his own part in the affair.

"The Hatchet and Royce sized each other up. The buck knew that Royce was after the girl, and he was after her, and I guess it was for the same reason —to find where that cussed gold came from. I wish to Heaven we'd never heard of it! But she takes to the Sioux. You remember that night at the dance? Well, Royce was for killin' him then. I wish I'd have let him do it. I was an idiot that I didn't!

"We found that the Hatchet had won her, and says Royce to me: 'We'll watch the buck. He's after the gold, because he knows what gold'll do. We'll watch the buck!' So from that time we never paid no attention to this Mary, but the Hatchet couldn't cook a bean without our knowin' it. Royce and me took turns. Maybe the Hatchet knew it. I'm not sure that he did, or that he didn't. If he did he showed some guts, because he kept his trap shut, and just led us on, and on, till he got us where he wanted us.

"We saw him pull out, and he met

the girl down by the Ramparts. It was all made up, I guess, between them. We went back to the camp, and got our dogs and outfit, which had been lashed to the sled for a week, just waitin' for this. We kept behind 'em all the time, and the Hatchet either let on he didn't know we were follerin' him, or kept from showin' it. He took us farther than we reckoned he would go, but we hung on like coyotes on a herd.

"By and by we got careless like, and one of our dogs died, and the wolves got another, and we had to leave one, and it was hard sleddin'. The wolves was around us nearly all the time. They'd come nights, out in the woods, lean and hungry, and try to get the dogs; but we always drove 'em off. Maybe it was the shots let the Hatchet know he was bein' chased. I don't know about that. Then we camped here. Some time. I don't know when. It seems like three or four years ago, now.

"We killed one of our last dogs to feed the others. Grub was gettin' scarcer all the time. We got up in the mornin' to break camp. Royce goes out to see whether the wind's come up to fill the Hatchet's trail. I was in the tent. He yells for me, and I knows by the sound somethin's wrong. I runs out. *Bing!* goes a rifle off in that patch of timber you'll see about a hundred yards ahead, and Royce begins to run back toward the tent. He runs in, and says to me: 'It's the Hatchet. He's after us.'

"Then he grabs his rifle, and starts back out. He makes it to the trees where you found him, and I'm tryin' to see where the Sioux is. There was another crack, and I heard Royce yell: 'Get your gun! Quick! He's plugged me!' I runs back to the tent, and while I'm inside I hears another shot or two, and then, when I comes out, there's another, and Royce, my pardner, is crumplin' up like a busted egg, and the rifle falls out of his hand. I'm sore, and run to see if I can help him, when I hear another shot, and a ball takes past my head.

"Well, that made me hotter'n ever, and I ran outside the woods to see. There stands the Hatchet, with his gun up, takin' aim at me. I gets behind a tree, just as he shoots, although it's no bigger'n your thumb."

Sparhawk stopped to cough in the ghastly, broken-lunged cough of a dying man, and it was a full three minutes before we could get him comfortable again, and then he laid there for some time, gasping, before he spoke.

"Where was I? Oh, yes. About the Hatchet. He started back toward the woods, as if tryin' to draw me out. He did, because I was sore, so sore I'd have gone to hell to have felt his sorrel throat in my hands. The trees was in the way, so I stepped to the open. I lifts the rifle to shoot, and just as my finger was on the trigger somethin' happened. I heard a yell! It was that Mary, and she run out and got between me and him before I could stop my finger. I could have shot myself when I see her fall. I hadn't nothin' agin' her. I sort of liked her. And there she went down, like a sack of salt with the bottom cut, slow like.

"I dropped my gun down and cussed, and would have gone over to see how bad she was hurt. The Hatchet is above her. I don't look at him. I'm sorry for her. Then comes something that knocks me over, there's a streak of red fire through me, and as I fall the sound of a shot. That Hatchet's got me!

"I don't know what it was made me lie still when somethin' kicked me in the ribs. Maybe because I was too weak to open my eyes, and didn't care. I knew without lookin' at him that the Hatchet did it, and that he was standin' there over me to see whether I was done for or not. I reckon he thought I was, for he went on over, and from where I could lay I saw he done the same to poor old Royce. He's a ravin' madman, and is mutterin' to himself. He gets our ax, and I hear him slashin', and I worked my hand up, and stuffed my parka into the hole he'd drilled in me, and waited.

"I guess I went off onct or twice, and it's a wonder I didn't cash in then. When I come to I heard an ax, then it stopped, and through my eyewinkers I

see the Hatchet make for the tent, as if he was in a hurry. He takes what he wants, grabs our other two dogs, and away he goes, stoppin' only onct, and that was when he passed the place where Mary lay. Then he went on. I waited a long time. The cold had kind of stopped the blood. I crawled back to where my pardner was. Already he was cold. It took me an hour to make the tent, and when I come to the next time, I was about froze. There was coals left, and I put in some of the pile of wood Royce had cut, and got into the blankets, and went off again."

He coughed violently, and Kentucky threw more wood into the stove, and handed me the flask, as if suggesting that it might prolong Sparhawk's life. I gave the dying man another dram of it, and he strengthened momentarily, and went on, as if eager to be through:

"It seemed to me it must have been a year that I was here alone, with them outside there in the cold, and me crawlin' out to get the last of the sticks Royce had cut. I know'd I had to make 'em last a long time, because I was too weak to cut any more, and so, sometimes for what seemed like two or three days, I'd let the fire go out after I'd clawed off a piece of blanket to make another start with. Sometimes I think I slept a week.

"Things began to come to the tent—the Hatchet, Mary askin' me to tell Constantine, and Royce sayin', 'The wolves'll get me if you don't get up and make a cache. You ain't goin' to leave me out there in the cold, are you, pard?' and then I'd try to get up, and fall over again. And I couldn't cook stuff, because I was too tired, and it hurt too bad, and I ate the grub raw. And a lot of fellers I know'd down in the Cœur d'Alenes, men that's been dead a long time, came and sat around the blankets, and talked, and said I was about due, and then it didn't seem so bad, and everything got blurred like, and I felt better. All I had to do was to put in a stick of wood now and then, remememberin' all the time that when it was gone I was done for, and I didn't care so much, at that."

He was babbling again, and Kentucky got up and went outside, as if he could not endure the sound, while I sat by his side, and tried to soothe him. His mind ran on the trail and other actions. Sparhawk was one of the dynamiters, all right. I learned that while I sat there by his side at the end. It came late at night, and was preceded by clarity, that strange gift of God, as if He lends time for review to those whose lives are done.

It was late, and still, and cold outside, snapping cold, when Sparhawk suddenly lifted himself to his elbows, and said, in a hollow, far-away voice, as if he were already speaking from beyond the pale:

"I'm goin' now. And I'm not afraid! It's the Hatchet's winning. He's got his satisfaction. He's gone on after the gold—the red gold that was the kind on the moccasins, and it'll do him no good. Hell itself made it red, and it'll redden the lives of all them that goes after it! You've stood by me, and—thanks!"

He dropped back before that final word was spoken, and it came fluttering from his lips to pass unheard in a silence less profound than that which engulfed us as we vainly tried to revive him, there in the cold heart of the arctic wastes and the arctic night, and the candle, steadily burning in its stick, showed that he had died with a cynical leer on his face, as if ridiculing us for our quest, and for the very act of pausing to be with him in the end.

Had either of us been in his place, and he in ours, he might have passed on callously, justifying himself with the reasoning that to pause would not prolong life, and that sooner or later all men must die. Hard had he lived, and hard did he die, up there in the end of the world, and we knew that from then on the trail would have but one set of sled marks, and one of moccasins', to the very end, whatever that might be.

CHAPTER XIV.

Something in us rebelled at laying the body of Sparhawk beside that of the poor girl he had unintentionally killed, although to have done so would save

time. So, hard pushed as we were, we paused long enough to build another platform in the trees, and laid the Cœur d'Alener there in his bound blanket.

Every hour was now precious to us, and yet we had to build one more cache in the trees near the tent on which to store what was left of the food belonging to Sparhawk and Royce. Evidently the Hatchet, traveling light, had taken but little of it, and left the remainder scattered about, either through Sioux profligacy, or because he was eager to get away from the scene. Perhaps, also, as suggested by Kentucky, there had lurked in his mind the thought that with one mouth less to feed, he could reach his goal, and return at leisure to seize the supplies of the white men whom he had sped into eternity.

"The Hatchet's trail is about finished," Kentuck said, as he thoughtfully wrapped some of the food into a compact bundle. "It looks to me as if he has an idea he could come back here 'most any time, and get this grub."

Of the food there was not much; but even that slab of bacon, heel of flour, few pounds of oatmeal, can of baking powder, and two sacks of cornmeal that we were to leave behind were worth their weight in gold. But we knew that we could not add a pound's weight to our sled, because we were faced with another loss, and must go on, with but three dogs. I knew that could we lay up for a week, there was a chance of saving his life, and the four dogs were not animals to me. They were friends I had petted for two years, and who loved me, as I did them. I wavered for a long time over that last sacrifice. And I could not be the executioner.

"Kentuck," I said, as we were making our last preparations, and had pegged the tent securely so that it might withstand any sudden wind, "I can't kill that dog. You'll have to do it."

It was the only time I ever knew him to falter. He turned squarely on me, and answered: "I'd as soon put a man to death as kill Keno. You do it, Tom. It's all we can do. Of course, he's got to die. We cain't leave him here."

"I'll be hanged if I will!" I retorted. "Well, I won't, and that's an end to my part of it. You'll have to!"

I looked at him, and saw that he would not, and so faced the necessary task. I felt like a murderer as I assured myself that my gun was working, and took a long time to be sure of it, for my heart was heavy. I stood outside the tent when Kentucky called:

"Just wait about five minutes, won't you, Tom? You see, the fact is, I'm like you. Keno and me has been friends, and he's done his best for us, and he's worked himself to death for us on this cussed trail, and—well, I don't want to hear the shot!"

He turned and hurried away, and I stood there with the gun in my hand in my mackinaw pocket. I walked out to where the dogs were. Three of them were up to greet me with wagging tails; but Keno lifted only his head, and tried to tell me in his way that he was ill. I bent over him, and patted the faithful head, and he licked the hand that was preparing to put him out of existence. I held his head close up against my side, and he rested it there, as if believing me his natural protector.

I suppose that I am a fool! I suppose you will call me a fool when I tell you that I couldn't shoot, and that my eyes were blinded! But I slipped the pistol back, and picked Keno up in my arms, and carried him to the sled.

"Kentuck! Oh, Kentuck!" I called. "Come here."

My trail partner came slowly toward me, and his face was grave.

"I didn't hear it, thank Heaven!" he said.

I pointed at Keno, lying on the front end of the sled, in a little bed made in its hollow tarpaulin.

"I'll try to pull harder to-day," I said, and Kentucky Smith shoved out his hand.

"You don't have to," he said, "because I'm goin' to do about two men's work myself."

And so we resumed the trail, with an added burden of weight, and a dog less to help drag it across the snow; but to this day I am unashamed.

We learned that the Hatchet had

camped but a mile ahead of his pursuers on that fateful night, and, as far as we could read the story from the snow, he had left Mary to pitch camp, and turned back to watch their preparations for the night. Evidently he had then returned, and in the morning made that desperate journey to annihilate his trackers. Where he had halted on that night were blackened sticks, and nearly all the tracks around were those of the squaw who was unconsciously so near the end of life. Out at one side was the frozen, famished body of another dog, that had evidently succumbed to the same scourge that was decimating our team. That was all, and his trail led on toward the northern hills, that rose higher and higher in front of us.

We came to another place where he had halted. Another straggling stretch of timber cut across a valley, and here we found a bundle. It consisted of his stove, together with Mary's extra clothing and blankets, proving that the weight was telling on him, and that he was sacrificing everything, save food, to lighten his outfit.

We hurried forward as fast as we could, without apprehension of overtaking him very soon, for we knew that he must be at least three or four days ahead of us. And of this we were not sorry, for the Hatchet had proved that following him was like crawling into a jungle thicket after a wounded tiger. Indeed, we speculated, as we tugged and dragged alongside our train-worn dogs, what could be the outcome of our meeting, and whether we should have to kill him in self-defense, or, like Sparhawk and Royce, we should come upon him too unexpectedly.

Keno, faithful, and striving to understand, insisted on getting off the sled at intervals, and staggering alongside. He would crowd up beside his old teammates, and turn back appealing eyes, as if asking why we had taken him out of the harness. His dumb distress haunted me continually as I pushed at the sled handles, or took my turn with a rope across my shoulders, pulling sometimes so hard that my snowshoes buried themselves in the softer places. Then he would begin to lag behind, and we would have to pick him up and lay him, panting, on the sled again.

Another dog showed signs of falling ill, by his lumbering gait, drooping tail, and irregular efforts at pulling, and disinclination to seize his scant rations.

"It's too bad," Kentucky said, as we stopped to make camp on the third night out from the Sparhawk-Royce resting place. "It looks as if we'll have to leave stove and tent, to lighten up, the same as the Hatchet. We cain't go much farther with this load, and another dog goin' out of business."

I did not answer, being too tired; but I knew that he was not whimpering or complaining; merely stating inexorable truth. We must lighten the load or abandon the chase, and the latter alternative was unbearable. It had become an obsession with us. We had come so far, over so many hundred miles of heartbreaking trail, through heart-chilling cold, that we would have died rather than turn back. We were in the midst of heavy trees, and it was already dark, for we had resolved always to make the camp where the Hatchet had stopped before resting, and this day had been long and hard. And the trees above us seemed gloomy as they stood, clouded firs with low-hanging limbs creeping along the ground, and silver birches, denuded by winter.

It was my night to do the cooking. We unharnessed the dogs, and gave them their fish, threw the line between the trees, and dragged the canvas across it, mounted the stove with its battered pipe that refused to join, brought in the blankets, and opened the grub sack.

I gathered near-by dead brush to start the fire, and had my hand in the flour sack and the sourdough can unswaddled, when I heard Kentuck's ax swinging into the tree he had chosen for fuel. I hoped it would have soft boughs on the end that we could drag in for a mattress over the snow, because I was deathly tired and stiff. My scant supply of brush was almost exhausted, and I went out and found some more, in the still white of the snow, and under the thin light of the stars.

"Got it 'most down?" I shouted, as the ax rested.

"Yes! Just a minute more!"

There were two or three more swinging strokes, and then the crash of the falling tree as its fronds swept downward to the bed of snow. It seemed to me that I heard an exclamation, and I waited an instant, with an armload of brush, to hear the ax resume. A premonitory chill attacked me, and for some inexplicable reason I shouted: "Kentuck!"

There was no answer, and I started toward him, forgetting that my snowshoes were sticking in the snow outside the tent.

"Oh, Tom! Come here! I'm afraid you'll have to help me," I heard his voice, and even then I distinguished in it a strained note.

I ran to the snowshoes, slipped my feet into the thongs, and hurried over the snow. Once I almost fell as in the darkness they tangled in the tops of brush concealed by the snow beneath.

"Here I am," the voice called, and I turned in its direction, to find him lying under the fallen tree on his back.

"I can't get clear," he said, "and somehow, Tom, I'm afraid one of my legs is caught. It hurts, and I can't use it. Help me out, won't you?"

I tried to drag him free; but had to desist because it pained him. The tree was not large, but was too heavy for me to lift. I cut a sapling, and tried to move it with this lever, but it turned soggishly, and then fell back into place, its limbs clinging to the snow in which they were imbedded. I hurriedly cut another sapling in the darkness, and worked it underneath as a support, then cut the tree in two, every blow torturing my pinioned companion. I got him free at last, and he made a heroic effort to rise; but he could not. I thought it must be his snowshoes, and burrowed under with my hands to unfasten the long, clumsy frames. Again he tried, and then settled back.

"Old man," he said, "it's no use. My right leg is broken somewhere below the knee. I can feel the bone grate when I twist. It's all up with us!"

I hurried back and got the sled, and lifted him on it, and dragged it to the tent, where the fire was almost out. I piled in the remnant of my brush, and unrolled the blankets on the snow.

"Try to stick it out a few minutes," I said, "while I get some wood. Whatever else we have to have, the first is fire."

I rushed back out, and worked madly there in the gloom, cutting sufficient wood to last for a while, and then returned with it piled on the sled. And, surmising that it might be serious, I slashed off and brought back with me the top boughs of the tree, to protect the blankets from the snow. I refilled the stove, piled the boughs deeply and smoothly, and helped him to roll off the blankets until I could lay him upon this comfortabe couch. I made three other candlesticks, and, reckless of the expenditure of light, put the tent in a blaze. Without much effort I removed his trousers. Our fears were confirmed. His right leg was broken—a compound fracture that would be serious anywhere, but here might be fatal!

I began to straighten it out. The stove roared to a red heat, and the tent was hot. As yet the moment of acute suffering had not come to his nerves.

"It was my snowshoe," he gasped, as I worked over him, forgetting all else at the moment. "The heel caught in the brush as I stepped back in the dark. It wasn't a big tree, but it caught me just right, as I fell while trying to stand clear of it. What on earth are we to do now?"

"Stay here till it gets better," I asserted, and he did not answer. "I'll have to hurt you while I try to set it, old man; but you must bear it. Wait till I cut one of the blankets for bandages to hold it."

I had seen crude surgery performed, but to see and perform is different. I cannot detail the hour of agony that followed as I did my best; how the sweat stood out on his forehead, and his hands clenched and unclenched, and he twisted, and writhed, and bit his lips; but he did not surrender, or lose consciousness, as I did my best, and laid

thin sticks of wood alongside the broken leg, and wrapped the woolen strips around to hold them in place. He went to a pain-disturbed, broken sleep at last; but it was daylight when I completed my task. I went out, and by candlelight cut birch trees of the right size, selected my pieces, brought them in, and thawed them by the stove, and then peeled off the bark, and made splints such as are used by the lumbermen. Admirable and efficacious!

Utterly worn out, I crept outside to pile up more fuel and feed the dogs. Beside the tent lay a still, brown heap. It was Keno, dead. We were one dog less, and I had lost my pet. It seemed to me as if everything in the world were against us as I swung my ax blade into the remnants of the tree that had been our undoing. I made the breakfast without disturbing Kentuck, then aroused him. He was far better than I had thought he would be, his splendid youth and constitution, his uninjured body kept clean and abstemious all his life, now repaying him.

"It aches like the devil," he said, "but I reckon that cain't be helped. I can eat, all right, and that's somethin' to be mighty thankful for. When did you work those out?" He saw the crude splints.

"Last night," I said. "They will have to be used as best we can, inasmuch as we have nothing else."

I did not tell him that the faithful Keno was dead, but went out to put the dog's body in the branches of a tree. The wolves should not have him! When I returned, Kentuck called to rest, and I threw myself on the blankets by his side, and was soon fast asleep. At intervals he awoke me when he moved, and I crawled up to put more fuel in the stove. Outside the dogs sniffed round the tent fly, and the short arctic day swept on across the sky.

I slept four hours, and then went out again, and cut wood as long as the light lasted, and piled it by the fly, and made the tent comfortable with a view to a prolonged stay; but all the time my heart was sinking when I thought of our scant food.

When I went to rest that night, Kentuck appeared better, but still lay there thinking about something, and now and then his face twitched with pain. It was dawn when he awoke me—not the dawn of the Southland, but of those chill latitudes into which we had penetrated in this foolish chase.

"I've been thinkin'," he drawled, as I made our simple breakfast. "And it's this way: We've come this far, and now, almost when we must be near the end of the trip, and when grub is about gone, and dogs 'most dead, I have to have this hard luck. And I don't believe much in luck, as a rule. There's just one way out of it. Tom, you've got to go on alone."

I turned on him with protest. He silenced me, as he lay there on his blankets and bed of boughs.

"No use, old man," he said, "it's the only way. You cain't do nothin' much for me here that I cain't do myself. You can fill the tent with wood, so it'll be close. You can bank the tent, and brace her so she won't sag or blow over. You can make kindlin' and get grub up around me so's I won't starve, and I'll be good for four or five days, or longer, and that's all it's goin' to take."

"But I might go farther."

'Then you'd die, because the grub wouldn't last. And if you sat here we're goners. And if you don't go, 'most any night there may come a wind, and out goes the trail of the Hatchet. It's stay here and die, or go on and take a chance of makin' good. Tom, you've got to go on, and you've got to go as soon as you can!"

For an hour we argued, with him on the blankets and I squatted by him; then I had to agree. So it was that I again worked late, and did all I could, and made ready for my start into that still, stretching waste on the trail of the Sioux.

CHAPTER XV.

It was harder now that I was alone, scant as was my load. I had but two dogs, Malicula, loyal and steady, and Barsick, the undemonstrative, as companions; for another dog had been left

behind, back there in the tent in the woods, where Kentuck was alone.

All day long we tugged together, dogs and master. So long had Malicula followed those other sled tracks, traced out like a faint road in the snow, and frozen into little rough lines, that he took the road instinctively. For hours at a stretch, I did not look at the land around me, save to remember landmarks, looking backward and stamping on my memory the details that I must remember for my return in case the shroud of snow obliterated the trail.

Now it was a hummock in the wide expanse; then it was a group of trees. Again it would be a lone pinnacle of a hill, and a wide tundra, where I noted my compass, and dragged off my mittens to write, with stiff, cramped fingers, the pointing of the needle. I was divided between two cares—solicitude to remember the backward route to where lay that brave, helpless, crippled man; and watchfulness ahead.

On the sled in front of me, caught by a mere string that could be broken, lay Dan's rifle, loaded; for I proposed to take no chances in case of conflict with the desperate Indian adventurer ahead. Not only was my own life at stake, but that of Kentuck, left behind, and to whom sooner or later I must return and assist, lest he die there miserably, in that terrible isolation. And always I was alert, constantly fearing that I should come upon the Hatchet so close that he would sense me, and lie in ambush to murder. Again I would steady myself with the thought, repeated aloud, that he would not pause until he came to those high mountains where stood three pinnacles, in distorted shapes, the pinnacles of the legend and the curse.

I camped late, and was grateful, in a peculiarly puerile way, to the Hatchet for having left me a wikiup, which gave shelter and a bed of boughs, the remnants of a charred log, and a piece of a snowshoe thong. I had but a robe, and the dogs slept on either side of me, their warm bodies lending comfort—Malicula bravely taking the outer edge, and the worn Barsick, black-coated, the inner. I talked to them as we ate together, and laid down to rest together, and I knew for the first time the depths of canine sympathy and companionship. Ah, I was learning; and coming nearer to nature's heart, away off up there in the frozen, uncharted lands on which God Himself seemed to have set His seal of isolation!

I slept late, because I was tired out, and took the trail reluctantly. Ahead of me was nothing but the rolling tundra. I may have plodded hours without noticing it, but I suddenly discovered something new and foreboding in the pale signs of the snow. They were tracks, huge and menacing, the tracks of timber wolves. They ventured alongside that other trail, and at times passed over it, obliterating it with the marks of broad, spread pads.

Persistently they were there, always defined remorselessly, as if they had scented and followed the Hatchet, and bided their time, as he must have bided his when he knew that behind him were men whom he proposed to make his prey. They were still there when the dusk made the trailing difficult, and I stopped watching them, leaving it to the intelligence of the great, gray beast ahead to keep the tracks, and bring me to a camping place. He stopped at last, and we were in a little draw, where willows, swept by early winter winds, reared their tops above the snow, melancholy and plumelike.

On this night there was no friendly shelter of trees, only those thin branches, congealed in the icy cold, still and immovable, above the place where the Hatchet had slept, and where we slept. But to-night the dogs huddled closer.

In the morning I bent over to study the strange writing around me. There was something peculiar in it. I stopped and picked it up. It was an empty shell of a repeating rifle. I found another. Again my foot struck something hard. It was the skull of a dog, polished to an ivory white. I wandered farther, more intent on my search. I found another skull, this time of a wolf, and farther out the vertebræ of two other dogs. Around all was that confusion

of tracks. I hurried out in widening circles to examine the trail in the dim light of the morning. It was plain.

When the Hatchet left that camp he had no dogs, but pulled his sled alone. The good fight he had made had not saved his team from that murderous and silent horde of gray. They had followed him, and fallen on his dogs, and though he shot to protect them, had feasted upon them and their own dead. The wolves were his final enemies. A chill went through my heart, and yet I reasoned that, inasmuch as I had heard no cry, they must have passed on, and I prayed to God they would not scent me and return.

Purposely I delayed when I found his next camp, which was early in the evening. I waited until the light was strong, and studied it. The wolf tracks were nowhere around. I sighed with relief as we started, for it proved to me that after that one desperate raid they had followed him no farther.

I passed with a lighter heart up a long series of low-lying hills, and then, at the top, paused with a long cry of excitement.

Shining in the distance, as cold and hard as signposts of fate, were three pinnacles rising from a chain of low mountains. Ghastly and white they appeared when outlined against the dense blue of the sky. And the trail headed toward them, straight as the flight of an arrow. They paled away as the day died out, and I did not hasten, fearing all the time to surprise this deadly character, who had struggled on, over dead bodies, to his ambition.

Without a fire, and out there on the rolling tundra, we slept, and I ate dog fish with the dogs, and rolled myself in my robes, and went to sleep, under the scant edge of the tarpaulin pulled across by the side of the upturned sled, in a foreboding blackness. The stars did not shine, and the dogs crawled closer and whimpered a little, as if sensing something beyond my intuition or perception.

I awoke in the night, and listened. Across the wastes came the creeping, stealthy sounds of something—the army of the snow set marching by the wind, and sweeping around to annihilate me. I shuddered, and could no longer sleep. The wind was not high, but it carried a menacing message, the whisper of death riding on the wings of the night. Drifts piled beside us, rendering our place warm and sheltered, with a false, soothing warmness, alluring and lethic.

I listened for it to increase, but it did not. It merely continued to sweep across ceaselessly, as if it were but the sound of that army—that army of snow crystals released from the frozen surfaces to overwhelm me. But I swore they had not come to conquer me here, and, long before morning, had resolved to face it at the first light of dawn. It must be that the mountain range was but a few miles beyond me, and that, in the shadow of those barricades, I should find still air, and fuel of some sort, if nothing more than the humble pussy willow of the watercourses.

The dogs whimpered and whined as I harnessed them after our cold morning meal, and went fearfully and with turned heads into the cutting gale. Their feet were raw, and spots of red marked their footsteps as they struggled forward.

The dawn came, like a twilight, chilling and steady. The trail was obliterated for the first time in that long journey, but we had the landmarks in view, faintly visible through the snow dust, and toward the range we headed, fighting our way foot by foot, and caring nothing for guiding tracks. The fear of surprising the Hatchet was lost in the face of that more imminent fear of dying, out there in a blizzard. We stiffly fought our way up a slope, and dropped down into a valley, where I presumed a stream ran in summer, and as suddenly as we descended its slopes the wind died.

The dogs took courage and strength, and moved faster. A clear, dark line was between me and the foot of the hills, which rose, abrupt and rugged, as if carved from the snow and ice. As we drew closer, I saw that their tops were so precipitous that snow had failed to find lodgment, and gave a sigh of momentary enjoyment, for there, dis-

cernible in the distance, were the shapes of the needle, the satanic outline, and the resting eagle!

Somewhere at their bases the trail would end. Somewhere at their feet was this undisturbed treasure, which had lured so many of us into these desolations, the lure for whose answer some of us had paid with our lives.

In a stillness rendered more profound by contrast with the storm from which we had emerged, we plodded forward. I saw that the dogs were sniffing now and then at the trail, and stopped them, and went ahead to brush away the surface snow with my mittens. It was there beneath, heading as were we, toward the peaks, the trail of the sled. We were still in the direct line, and now it would be but a short time until the end of the quest would be opened to view and action. I took the rifle from its lashings, saw that the lever worked, and laid it where it could be seized in an instant. The Hatchet must shoot true with his first shot, otherwise our chances would be equalized.

As we advanced, I strained my eyes for any thread of smoke to betray his camp; but nowhere was there anything to show that this waste had ever been violated by a human being. I was more alert as we approached the thin timber, and carried my rifle on my arm, waiting for the opening of the battle, or a shout of warning.

None came. I was strung to the utmost tension, until my overwrought nerves vibrated when we passed into the birches and firs, all scrubby and scant.

I halted the dogs, and listened; but there was no sound, only a silence so vast that it was oppressive and tangible. It was as if the air itself, the coldness, the stillness, were weights suspended over me for my destruction. It was as if all the forces of nature were assembled to exterminate me when I had taken another step into that mysterious region of the accursed; as if the sagas and warriors of all the dead tribes were marshaling to bar my way, and sweep me from existence for my temerity.

It may have been my nerves, or it may have been something else—an underlying fear that there was something supernatural in this region which I had invaded; but I was afraid! My hair was on end, and bristled. There in the broad day I saw shapes in the trees, and heard sinister sounds, menacing me. I should have welcomed the sight of the Sioux and conflict with something which I could see and understand. I was not afraid to die, but I was afraid of the phantoms conjured by my fears. It was all so still, so ghastly white, so terribly alone! Even the dogs appeared to sense it by their faltering, cautious steps, and crowded so close on me that Malicula once trod upon the ends of my long snowshoes, and almost threw me.

Again I stopped and looked for signs, walking warily backward and forward. A broken twig was my reward, and I stopped, as before, and swept away the snow. The trail was still there, leading through the thicket, where the Hatchet had gone steadily on. I left the dogs behind, and took the course, crouching behind the closest trees, and with my rifle hammer raised, and a finger in my mitten upon the trigger, cold and nervous. Step by step I slipped forward, peering this way and that in search of something—anything—that would expose the native who to me was the living death.

Suddenly, as I descended farther into what seemed to be the bed of a frozen stream, I saw a shape. It was his crude shelter, but from it there arose no smoke. I crept forward now, slowly and with caution, fearing that in the intense stillness the slipping of my snowshoes over the snow would betray me. I gained the shelter, and looked around its corner. Its ashes were cold, and covered with a light drift of snow. I parted the fir boughs of this three-sided abode, and looked more closely.

From the pole above, against which leaned lopped limbs of heavy trees, with snow piled on top to give shelter and warmth, were hanging the scant sacks of his outfit. His blankets were thrown back in confusion, and his sled was upturned outside. His ax was where he

had struck it into the side of a log, and his frying pan and coffeepot and kettle, blackened by many camp fires, were thrown carelessly into a corner. But there were no tracks.

For a long time I wondered at this, trying to reason out why it should be so. Here was his outfit, everything he had, and yet the fire was old, and everything appeared deserted. I could not imagine what had happened. I took courage from the fact that there were no signs in the new snow, which at that place must have been three or four days old, so lowered my rifle, and walked around for a closer inspection. It was plain that this was his outfit, left there in loneliness.

I kicked the log which had been laid in front of this crude dwelling place, but there was not a spark left in its charred sides. I stepped farther out, and looked around me. Nothing was in sight save this sole abrasion on nature. Above me rose the three peaks, towering up into the deathly air. The trees stood as still as if carved from stone. Fifty or seventy-five feet beyond me ran something black and steaming on the surface. I walked toward it, wondering if I were to see another phenomena of the arctic, a spring so hot that it never froze. It ran for some distance before being masked with ice.

Almost at its brink my foot struck a bump in the snow. I did not notice it at the instant, for I was looking down into the bed of a stream running across a bed rock which was almost bare, but in whose leaves were long stringers of brilliant red, the red of the red gold!

I stumbled forward and slipped my feet from the thongs, and jerked off my mittens, and thrust my hands into that heated water poured forth from the fiery heart of the earth—or was it hell?—and caught up and let fall through them that lavish stream of gold.

It was there! Gold in greater abundance than I have ever seen! Gold that dripped from my wet fingers, and splashed back into the clear, warm water. Gold in such abundance that under my eyes lay a fortune. A stream almost paved with it, as if all the red gold of the world had been collected there to await my coming! Farther and farther I plunged my hands, and piled it at the water's edge, a heap of it, until I had a pyramid, a fortune, the life's savings of many men, the sum of luxury, the dream of a miser!

Above me the peaks still stood in their strange shapes, looking down like so many judges ready to pass sentence. Above them was the cold, discerning sky, and beyond them the immutable spaces that had waited my coming. I was mad! I was bereft of all sense! I plunged into the stream, forgetful of the menace of the Hatchet, of the cold air, of the dangers of freezing when I stepped out, and walked through the shallow water.

I walked on gold, red gold! It was there! Mine! All I had to do was to scoop it up, each handful placing me higher on the ladder of the luxuries of life. My situation, my desperate condition, Kentucky Smith—everything was forgotten in that baptism of hot water as I stared with bulging eyes at the gold beneath my feet.

I was disturbed by a sound of something—wood striking wood, and down through the trees came the dogs, Malicula and Barsick, dragging the sled after them, and looking at me with appealing eyes. They were calling me to reason—bringing me back to reality! I waded back toward them, and stepped out on the bank. Again my foot struck the object which I had first encountered, and it rolled away, and lodged but a few feet beyond. I stepped over and picked it up. It was a skull, freshly cleaned by ravenous teeth, and as I held its gruesome face toward me I saw that in the hollow grin was a broken tooth capped with silver. And almost beside it was something else. Even in that horrible moment I stooped to pick up the moccasins of gold.

CHAPTER XVI.

Slowly, as I stood there with them in my hand, I pulled my senses together, and subjugated both fear and elation, which were strangely intermingled. I went back to the Hatchet's camp, and

started the fire in the charred embers he had left, and hastened to unpack the sled and don dry moccasins, condemning myself for rushing into the water in my moment of frenzy. I threw the dogs a half fish each, to keep them away from my heels, and went out and with my feet felt the thin top covering of light snow.

I found the Hatchet's rifle at some distance from where I had discovered his skull. It was empty, and the stock was cracked and smeared, where he had made his last desperate fight after his ammunition was expended.

Probably he had clung to the moccasins through some wild pathetic regard for the squaw who had last owned them, and so brought them back to the source of their gold. Perhaps they had been carried as a useless burden in his clothing when he fell, hampering his very movements in that last stand, when movement meant life. Perhaps they had aided the wolves and death.

The whole dread picture, brought up by imagination, did not serve to render the spot more habitable! I could not help but wonder if the smoke of my fire might not bring back that famished pack. I had more ammunition, I was certain, than the Hatchet had, but no more endurance. That pack must have been great in numbers, a horde of famine. And it must have been a persistent pack, wearing him out with sleeplessness and unrest, until he lost caution, and gave way to temper, ready to die rather than have them longer glaring at him from the shadows, and now and then encroaching, perhaps sometimes leaping across to get at him, when his fire died low.

I invoiced his food supply. The man must have been mad to stop there a day, when under quarter rations he could scarcely have made the return trip to Sparhawk and Royce's camp. I must fight off a similar madness. I must control myself lest that red temptation keep me there a day too long, and send me backward starving, or drive me to madness and the end there by the steaming water.

At the very best I had not enough food to take me back to Kentuck on full rations. The dogs were the most important. Very well, I would eat no meat, and would cook the last of my dog fish and bacon sparingly, with oatmeal, and feed them on that. Kentuck and I had believed, as doubtless had the Hatchet, that the red gold was probably less than two days' journey from the camp where he had left the body of Mary; but it was almost double that, so I must not delay.

My discoveries were not over, for I made one trip upward along the banks of the stream above where the hot spring entered to wash its golden freight. A cairn of rocks was there, and I wondered what meaning it could have, so worked for an hour exposing its contents. They were gruesome, for the face of Pitkok, frozen and wide-eyed, stared up at me. I was glad I had found him, for the last remnant of suspicion of Sam Barstow was swept away. I could tell Cavanaugh, if I survived to see him, that Sam had told the truth. The torn body was evidence. Pitkok had been killed by a bear in the very goal of his foolish ambitions. Hurriedly I replaced the stones, and hurriedly I went back to the Hatchet's camp.

I patched up the dogs' moccasins, and thought with some satisfaction that the day's rest would put them in better condition, if they were well fed. I went down to the stream to get water. It was salt, and impregnated with iron. I had to take the time to melt snow for my meager cooking. I cut and dragged great piles of fuel, so that, if the wolves returned, I should at least have flame. And then, when all these tasks were complete, I braved the stream, and scooped out more of the gold, until I must have had fifty pounds of it in the tin receptacles I had inherited from the Sioux.

It is with some pride, even at this moment, that I recall my restraint; for there lay temptation which was almost irresistible, but that would have certainly led me to death. I suppose I gathered more than fifty pounds of that red metal, reveling drunkenly in having

so much of it at hand, under such a thin coating of gravel, that all I had to do was to claw it from the natural riffles in the bed rock as the stream swept and cleaned it down the natural sluices. I still believe that nowhere in the world, not even on the Mother Lode, was there ever such a placer deposit, in that same space at least.

And then at night I sobered down, and thought of the weight we must pull, of the long trail, of the shortness of food, of the condition of my two dogs, of how weak I would be when traveling on poor nourishment, and slowly, handful by handful, reluctantly lightened my treasure, and carried it back, and threw it into the stream, where it would again be caught and preserved for that time when Kentucky or I might come again. And even then it seemed to me that the voice of prescience told me that neither of us would ever again stoop to gather it!

As night came there was a shadowy depression over everything. The dogs by my side howled until I had to use harsh measures to still them, lest that far-reaching wail bring those enemies of the tundra down upon me, as they had come down on the Hatchet, whose skull and such of his bones as I could gather were resting in the crotches of a tree. It seemed to me that his spirit hovered outside the blazing logs, and that he glared at me with his fierce eyes, impotent and angry because I was the only one of that sorry procession to live. It seemed to me that he wanted to drag me across the borderland of shadow.

I could not sleep. My nerves were tingling, and beside me the dogs shuddered, and whimpered, and burrowed against me, as if for protection. The northern sky grew lighter, a finger of flame appeared to stretch across it, to be followed by waving shrouds of white, like the vestments of an army of ghosts. They danced recklessly and rapidly across the vault of the night, and changed their colors to a riot of red, with here and there a somber spread of crimson and blue. They took fantastic shapes, as if rendering more unreal their dance of death. They threw, as if purposely, a background of light behind the three peaks above me, so that I might fully realize their dread presence, and see the cruel, malevolent, devilish face of rock.

But now that face in the twisting light seemed mobile, and sometimes leered, sometimes frowned, and 'most always threatened with such dread looks that I was chilled with a strange fear. The eagle no longer squatted, but his wings seemed lifting, little by little, and once I feared that he would launch himself downward, a mountain of stone, to bury me in his sweep. The trees beside our camp seemed to shudder, and whisper, and turn toward me, and the faint sound of the running water was a demoniacal consultation and prediction of my end.

Nerves? I don't know! Perhaps; but what matter, so long as fear had gripped me, and tore at me, and made me long to scream aloud! I believe that I should have died had I been thus obsessed for ten consecutive nights in that place, and I thought of the Hatchet's terror. What must it have meant to him with that hereditary belief in spirits of the dead, in the supernatural lore of the Indians, and the possibility of the place of red gold being cursed forever! May he have not seen Royce and Sparhawk across the fire, even as I fancied I saw him? May they not have stretched clutching fingers toward him, to drag him out, as he did toward me?

I fought with myself, piled more fuel on, and suppose I went to sleep.

I was awakened by the most bloodcurdling snarls and howls I have ever heard. Both dogs were on me, and mad with fear. In the light I could see that their ruffs were raised, until every hair was on end, and their fangs were bared beneath their snarling lips as they confronted something I could not see, out beyond the flames. I threw them off, and got to my feet in one bound, with my rifle in my hand, my scalp itching as if with electric shocks, and my fingers twitching on the trigger. I scowled out into the darkness.

Nothing could be seen—nothing

could be heard. I thought of wolves, and sprang to the fire, and kicked light sticks on it until it was in a furious blaze. I leaned across it, with the dogs so close to my heels that they were almost singed, and listened.

There was not a sound, save that made by the crackle of the flames and the stream which carried the red gold. Now it seemed to me to be hissing and angry. The shadows outside were still, but they had assumed indefinite shapes. Invisible enemies were waiting for me outside the line of fire. With a sudden determination of anger, I leaped across it, and with its light at my back could see. I was prepared for an attack; but none came.

Under the stars and on the underglow, dim and spectral, of the snow, I could see everywhere. There was nothing in sight. Only that deathly immobility of tree and plain and hill, and above me the three pinnacles that were leaning forward to menace me and guard the treasure. The dogs had leaped, whining, after me. Malicula stood between my legs, still growling and snarling at that something I could not see, and Barsick huddled at my feet, snapping now and then, as if attacking something invisible. I felt it, but could not see it, felt it as certainly as I am now alive!

I went back behind my barricade of fire, and sat there with my rifle between my knees, and my arms around my dogs, for centuries. I have lived a thousand years, if ever any man did, whether it be, as some might think, through fright and madness, or because every instant of that dread, expectant wait became a decade! And I am not afraid to die! Nor am I afraid of any living thing! But there was something there that night that was harder to wait for than either life or death!

I had packed the sled before rolling into my blankets, and all I had to do was to throw the latter in, lash the fastenings, hitch on the dogs, and go. I presume there are those who will say I was a coward when, at last, with the shriek of a madman, hoarse and inhuman, I caught the dogs, and dragged them out and slipped the harness over their heads.

All the time they snarled and threatened, but their anger was not directed at me, nor did they appear less eager than I to get away from there. It was not later than four o'clock in the morning, but we plunged away from the stream of gold almost before the last sled lash had been recklessly thrown, and ran, until breathless, through the trees and up the long slope dividing the pinnacled rocks from the tundra beyond.

We ran until I was divested of parka and mackinaw, a piece at a time, and the sweat trickled across my face in that fearful cold, and my lungs were aflame, and the dogs were exhausted. Then we slowed down as our sense returned, and traveled only to keep off the chill until we were cool, and tired, and the great fear was gone—left behind!

They whimpered to me now when I came alongside them, and licked my hand, as if thanking me for taking them away from that place of the curse, where they could apprehend shapes that to me were invisible. And, tired as I was, every mile put behind lightened my fear, until, when we made the camp where I had last halted before venturing toward the peaks, I could pause, and wonder what had so obsessed me, and could endeavor to laugh.

It had taken me three days to make the stream of treasure, and, with the additional weight of the gold, it took me four to return. And the last of these I went with scarcely any food, striving to conserve it all for the dogs, and believing that could they but last to where Kentucky was camped, we could survive. If they did not—well, then the end was not hard to conjecture for both him and me, unless the chase, problematical anywhere that far north, yielded fresh meat. There were a hundred times on that terrible trail when I resolved to dump overboard the gold that I was bringing back, and then the determination rose triumphant that I would at least die with something to show for the trip.

I think that brooding, after all that I had endured, was beginning to tell on me; for little things were catastrophes. The breaking of a harness strand, the loosening of a sled lashing, the tripping of a snowshoe, the lightest scurry of wind, a moment's perplexity as to what course I should take on that vast tundra where the trails had been wiped out—any of these would drive me to a paroxysm of temper. I thank God that I did not abuse the poor dumb brutes that were giving me their last ounce of strength in willingness and working with me as we trudged across that unending waste.

One morning after we had traveled until noon, I found that I had left behind, inexplicably, the most precious of my possessions, my knife. I roared in anger, and shook my fists at the skies. I sprang to the sled, jerked off the lashings from the top, and took out the golden moccasins. I threw them as far as my arm could throw, cursing them as they fell heavily into the distant snow, as the cause of all my misfortune, and so, at last, they found a resting place after all their journeying, and all their association with tragedy.

Twice I lost my way, and wandered vainly for hours, brushing or blowing the top coating of light snow aside, in quest of the sled trails made by the Sioux and me in that desperate Northerward chase.

A scarecrow of a man, worn to a razor's edge, and driving dogs who dragged themselves wearily over the trail, I came at last to the copse I knew. The dogs lifted their heads, and barked joyously, and plunged forward more rapidly. I saw that smoke was curling from the stovepipe, and was choked with joy, for I knew that Kentuck was still alive, and I am not sure that I did not cry as a woman from weakness and satisfaction as we stopped in front of the tent.

CHAPTER XVII.

His cheery "Hello!" was the most welcome sound I had heard in weeks. I hurried into the tent where he was lying, and he put a hand up to me. The tent was warm; but I had arrived none too soon.

"I got it!" I exclaimed, but he only smiled at me, with a pathetic, tired face. "It was there, all right, more than I can tell you of until I can eat. I'm in!"

"Poor old chap," he said softly. "You look as if about one more day of the trail would have finished you, and then—then—what would have become of me!"

The half sob in the voice told me what he had feared, what he had suffered, and I turned my back to him, and tried to speak cheerfully, but scarcely recognized the thin, croaking voice as my own.

"The last of the beans are over there in the kettle," he said, and I seized them like a famished animal, checking myself only from the danger of overeating by a remnant of will power. And in the night I arose and ate again, because the overworked body cried aloud for food, even in sleep.

I learned much of that terrible lapse which he had endured, helpless and alone. The other dog was dead. Once he had heard wolves, but they had been distant, and his fears had come to naught. His leg was doing as well as could be expected, and he had succeeded in removing the bandages the day before, and putting the crude splints closer. But it was a long time before we spoke of one element, and that was the supply of food. When we did it was with averted eyes, for each knew that there was scarcely any left.

"We'll talk about that in the morning," I said, as, half ill, I crawled into my blankets. And by the morning, so resilient is life, so tenacious, so self-repairing, that some of my courage had returned, and the world was more normal.

Kentuck must have been awake a long time, and careful not to disturb me, for he had started the fire from where he lay, and the smell of smoke awoke me. I was about to speak, but checked myself, and rested, with eyes closed, trying to reason out our best course. It came to me, as a certainty, that our slim hope of life lay in press-

ing back to the place where the triple tragedy had been consummated, for there, at least, was a little food. Slowly I thought over the quantity I had left with Kentuck when I started on alone, and came to the conclusion that there could be scarcely any left. My resolve was taken.

I yawned and sat up, as if just aroused, and he looked at me with the look of a child staring at its guardian. In the daylight I saw how seriously his misfortune had told on him, and my heart sank a little, as I saw that his face was so much thinner, his hands so much more nervous, and his whole body so much wasted.

"Sleep well? You have been at it fourteen hours," he said. "But I was afraid you didn't, because you moaned, and swore, and shrieked, in the night, sometimes."

"I feel fine," I asserted. "I did dream some; but that doesn't count."

I pretended to be thoughtful.

"I think I told you, last night, all about the place where the gold is, and that I found Pitkok's body as well as the Hatchet's, and that I brought away a little of the gold, all I could bring, on account of the weight?"

"Yes," he said; "you told me that much, and said the gold was in the sled. I'd like to see it."

"But I didn't tell you that I got quite a little food left by the Sioux."

"No!" he said incredulously. "Well, that's the best news of all."

He thought for a moment, and then his face twitched with the weakness of the man who has suffered illness, and he said: "Old man, I thought when you came in last night that you had been starving to death. I couldn't talk. This lump in my throat! That's why the gold you brought back didn't seem so good. It hurt mighty bad to look at you when you came in. I had to keep right quiet to—well, to keep from blubberin' like a baby!"

He had brightened as he talked, as if his mind were relieved, but I dared not meet his eyes lest he read that lie. I assumed a gayety I did not feel, and brought him the red gold, through which he ran his fingers, picking up a nugget now and then to inspect it, and studying that curious red while I prepared the breakfast. It was liberal. I resolved to have all I wanted once more before I died, no matter what the cost. After that I must—I can scarcely write now of how my resolution wavered, of how cowardly I was, and of how I shrank from what must come.

"But we must go on—to-day!" I asserted. "We must get back to that other camp, or we will starve, most certainly."

"Then we must leave this behind," he asserted, sighing as he dropped the nuggets he had been holding into the black pot at his side.

"Yes," I assented. But it was another lie, for I had become so filled with hatred for that gold, and what it had cost, that I had resolved that I would return with it or die. "I'll cache it somewhere, so that we can get it if ever we come back."

"If we come back? If we come back!"

His voice had the helpless tones of a man whose spirit has been broken by all that he has endured, and I knew, then, that Kentucky Smith had lived through centuries in that time when I was absent, as surely as had I, struggling always.

We broke camp at noon. I know it was noon when I lifted him to the sled, and prepared to say good-by to the scene of misfortune, for I looked at my watch and wondered how far we could travel, Malicula, Barsick, and I, before the last light waned. Every hour must be made to count. Every mile traveled meant that much more of a chance to live. And God knows I was tired when we started, and that had not Kentucky Smith, broken, ill, and helpless, been there behind me, I would rather have taken my pistol and put a more merciful end to the faithful dogs and myself, than have attempted it.

It was that same interminable struggle, that same interminable suffering, that I had endured from the time I turned my back on the three peaks, now so far behind. The frozen meat of a

dog, a stringy skeleton, meat for the team, half rations for a man helpless and requiring nourishment, and quarter rations for myself, were supplies with which I faced that journey, which had taken us three days to make when we assisted each other.

How I lied on that trip! How the cunning of a madness that had become constant made me dissemble about my share of the food! How many mornings I arose quietly, and stealthily, and weakly, and assured him that I had breakfasted, when my famished eyes followed every mouthful as he conveyed it to his lips! How I nibbled at the moldy dog fish, which I had reserved for myself, stealing rather from those poor brutes tottering alongside me in the trail than from Kentucky Smith.

He told me, long after, that there were times when he was afraid of me, as I reeled along the trail, singing in a cracked voice as I tried to make him feel that I was happy and confident. He told me long afterward that it took us six days to get back to the place where we had cached the food left by Sparhawk and Royce, and that at the last I heard sounds which were not audible, and threatened to kill him when he tried surreptitiously to lighten the load of the red gold. But to me much of it is a blank, and instead of six days we trailed through eternity, with that profanation of French, "Mush! Mush on!" always my sole thought.

I do remember this, that for a long time we traveled through silence, and that I was deathly ill, and that the snow was coated with red, which I thought was a coating of red gold, and that I cursed it, and that at last we saw something ahead that I vaguely remembered having seen before, as I gave a final stagger, threw the rope from my shoulder, and pitched headlong into the soft snow beside our trail.

The first thing of which I have a clear recollection is Constantine's face bending over me, and the hot, wonderful draft of meat broth poured down my throat. Of how my clawlike fingers seized the edge of the tin kettle, and of how I cried like a child, and tried to fight for its retention, as he pulled it away from me.

We were in that ill-fated camp, and the days had passed. Constantine had at last got word that his sister had started away Northward with the Sioux, and, as it came to him from Taninaw, he surmised where they were going. He, too, had heard where it lay, and had gone to find her. I doubt not that in his heart was some other hope, that primitive, savage desire that never quite leaves the primitive man—the thirst for vengeance.

Patiently he had trailed them to this camp, to his sorrow. And there he had found her body, and knew that his quest for her at least was at an end, and, with native reasoning, when he saw the cache of food, had concluded that sooner or later his enemy, the Hatchet, would return. Caribou had crossed his trail, and he had an abundance of food, and I doubt not would have remained there, waiting, and waiting, for months, had we not come to tell him that the Hatchet was beyond his earthly reach. Like ours, his quest was at its end.

And so, in time, before the snows were gone, we turned again toward the south. But now it was not so hard, for he had many dogs and we had much food, and the cold was not so drear, and Kentucky was recovering.

It was in the afternoon and the days were already unduly warm, when we trailed through the soft snow around the bend, and caught our view of Neucloviat. The snow had been so soft that it had clogged and delayed us, and the daylight was long, for the sun had returned to the North to bring the melting of the blanket, the breaking of the ice, the songs of the birds and wild fowl flying to their breeding grounds, and the brilliancy of spring. For hours we had skirted the edges of the river, fearing at any time to see dark cracks outlined on its surface. Water was gurgling here and there from the entering streams, and so it was with great relief that we saw the camp.

A group of men stood in front of the

trading post, whose door was open, and called to others in surprise at finding any one still traveling. They ran down the bank as we approached, and first of all I heard Dan's voice bellowing a welcome, mixed with scathing accusations of desertion to conceal his happiness. Kentucky hobbled off the sled with his crutch, and Cavanaugh took hold of my arm.

"You've been there?" he questioned, and there was not quite an interrogation in his voice.

"Yes," I said, and I could not repress a shudder.

"Tell me about it to-night," he said, putting a finger to his lips, and I understood and acquiesced.

We talked at random with those around, and Dan and I at last got into the corner of the post alone.

"Tom," he said, "what made you do it? Are you daffy?"

"Dan," I said, "I found it. It's there, lots of it, the red gold."

For a full minute he looked at me, and then reached up and ran his fingers along the edges of my hair.

"And it ran threads of white through there, didn't it, old pardner! And it stole twenty years from the sluice boxes of your life! And so, for me, it can stay there. We have gold, honest gold, bright and yellow, in our own ground. More than you and I'll ever want. I struck it four days after you left, and for weeks there hasn't been a day when there were less than twenty or thirty men workin' on the claim."

"But, Dan," I said, "I don't think I ought to be in on that. I went away. I didn't help. It ought to be all yours. I've got some of the red gold—maybe ten thousand dollars' worth."

"I'll have none of it!" he roared. "I'm afraid of it. It ain't no good! It's under a curse, as sure as there's a God! Give it to Kentuck, Tom, and be my pardner. I've always figured you as in half, just the same, and just as you figured me in for half of what you'd find away off up there."

He suddenly caught me by both arms, and looked down into my eyes. His voice lowered, and was tender as a woman's:

"I know one reason why you went, Tom. You wouldn't have done it, I have a notion, if it hadn't been that you thought about me and what I told you. Ain't that so?"

I held my tongue. He knew. He gave me a slap on the back that almost toppled me over.

"That's settled!" he declared. "There'll be no more talk about that part of it. You're to give what you brought back to Kentuck. If it makes you feel any better, we'll dope it out that we three own the red-gold claim together, and will go for it if it ever strikes us that we need it. But now you're my same old pardner, and there's gold enough cached in that safe in the corner over there, so I ain't thinkin' you'll try again for the other."

Outside, Constantine was throwing off Kentuck's and my things. The idlers had turned their attention to an excited argument farther up the street, in front of the Horn Spoon, which now seemed to me like a scene from a past life. I carried in the heavy burden of red that I had clung to through all those desperate leagues, and asked Cavanaugh to put it in his safe. He did so with a wry face, as if hating its sight. I was to see it but once more.

"There's Kentuck, askin' Windy Jim if he can use his cabin till he gets some other place to bunk," Dan's voice growled behind me. "Go tell him now. He must feel bad at havin' nothin', poor cuss!"

I went up and waited until Jim had assured him that he was welcome, and then hastened to join the crowd farther up that turgid line of cabins forming the water front.

"Kentuck," I said, when we were alone, "I always told you that half of whatever I got beonged to Dan; so Dan and you and I are still pardners in that claim back off in the North."

"Me? Not me!" he asserted. "You found it. It's yours."

I did not heed him.

"Dan has struck it while I was gone.

I don't need any of the red gold. So I'm going to make you take what we brought out. There must be about ten thousand dollars' worth. It will be enough for you to—well, to carry out what you want to do."

He looked at me in a puzzled way, leaning on his crutch.

"What I want to do? I don't quite get you. What do you mean?"

"To marry Bessie." The words came with difficulty, and slow.

He leaned back and laughed, while I stood, open-mouthed.

"Marry Bessie! Never thought of such a thing! Besides, I'm engaged to a girl down in Kentucky, and she knows it! She's a bully little pal. She's the only real sister I ever had, is Bessie!"

I rubbed my hands over my eyes, and for an instant believed that the madness of that far North still befogged me. I stammered when I spoke, and the words were jumbled.

"But I saw her kiss you—and you held her in your arms—and you kissed her—that day when the mail came in—and you had a letter in your hand—then!"

Again he laughed, and then sobered to a rare gravity.

"What a fool I am, never to have quite understood, and I wondered a heap about it, too, when there was nothin' else to do. That letter was from my brother. He's a big insane specialist out in the States, and he was answerin' a letter of mine that I never told her about, in which I put old Bill's case up to him. Never did so much writin' about how a man acted in my life! And he wrote back that there was still a chance for Bill, and that, if he could have him brought out, he might pull him around and straighten him out. And when I read the letter to Bessie, she just naturally flung her arms around me, and said: 'You dear thing! If I wasn't in love with Tom, I'd marry you!'"

I could not answer. I was too hurried. I was too far away! I was running up the hill to the cabin of hope, and—well, I was not at Cavanaugh's to tell him the story until quite late!

They are scattered now, after all these years. Cavanaugh is gone on that last, long trail, and may Heaven rest him! Faithful in life to the daughter of the woman he loved, he was faithful in death, and she inherited all that he had to give, even to the last red nuggets from his safe, and perhaps, although he left a modest fortune, they were the most prized, for in them was our story. Kentuck comes to see us once in a while, with his brother, to whom, even when dying, Bill Wilton was grateful for his last years of life, the life that held so much that was a blank.

Dan and I pass slow and soft lives up here in the Sierras, and each year the mine pays us well, and we are not eager for more. Particularly is this so with me, when Bessie tells me that she is content, and I am reminded of the long, bitter trail by Malicula and Barsick, sleeping the sleep of the aged on our porch.

It is still there, somewhere off up in that far North, a reef of gold, red gold, gold the color of blood, as if the blood of all those who sought it had stained it deep down into the frozen soil, and had warmed to perpetual warmth the waters that flow across it from the spring at the foot of the three peaks. But from it I claim nothing, not even a hope, a desire, or a curiosity. Cursed or not, it holds no thrall on me, and I want none of it. Is there anything in the superstition surrounding it, as it lies there, red and gleaming? That, too, I do not know. But of its story and what it cost those who knew of it, I have told.

Whose Turkey?

By William Hamilton Osborne

Author of "Tricky Mr. Tannenbaum," "The Blockade Runner," Etc.

His number was thirteen, so how could he lose? As it turned out he got all that was coming to him, and then some. So you can hardly blame Jimmy if he was surprised to find that his turkey was worth its weight in gold

MICHELE GOULET'S red and shining nose sparkled gloriously in the dim lights of his Montreal café. He sat, cross-legged, on one end of his little bar, with three glasses of dripped absinth by his side, for this was an unusual occasion—the annual raffle of the month of November.

"Aha!" laughed old Goulet, gulping his absinth quite recklessly and flinging a huge turkey into the center of the crowd, where it was caught by a bearded giant, "fowl number nine goes to François Lenoir. Good. A fine bird to a fine bird. And now fowl number ten. Blindfold me once more."

François Lenoir, with his prize over his shoulder, pushed his way toward the bar. "One instant, Père Goulet," he exclaimed, "the treat, it is of me."

He was quite right. It was. The crowd, bright-eyed with many treats, surged forward. Only two men held back. These two men stood in a dark corner of the dingy little place. François tossed a magnificent look toward the two, and beckoned.

One of the two, Jurgens by name, merely shook his head. The other man gave no sign. He merely watched Jurgens. Suddenly he touched Jurgens on the arm.

"You are like me," he said, "you do not drink."

Jimmy Jurgens turned his young and boyish countenance upon the stranger. "I might drink fast enough," he returned, "but I haven't got time. I wish old Goulet'd hurry up. I'm waiting for my bird."

The stranger smiled. "Which bird?" he asked.

"The only one that's left," said Jimmy Jurgens. "Turkey number ten."

The stranger smiled again. "You call it your bird?" he ventured.

Jimmy exhibited a bit of pasteboard. "My number is thirteen," he said soberly. "How can I lose?"

The stranger shrugged his shoulders. "How can you win?" he queried.

Jimmy scowled. He shifted the burden of his muscular young body from one foot to the other. "I've always won with it so far; and, beside, I've had a run of confounded bad luck, and it's due to turn, that's all."

The stranger leaned against the wall. "Bad luck?" he asked.

"Ah," said Jimmy, "the strike at the paper mill—L'Hommedieu's—you know about it, maybe?"

The other man seemed puzzled. "Funny. I shouldn't have taken you for a Canuck. I sized you up as coming from the States."

"Right," returned Jimmy. "I do. Come from Halcyon, New York."

At that instant there was a commotion at the crazy little bar. The crowd fell back, and became instantly silent.

Old Goulet, still cross-legged—he had been a tailor once—held up his hand.

"Attention—one and all!" he cried.

A handkerchief was tied tightly across his eyes. Some one passed a little wooden box in front of him. He

thrust his hand inside, fumbled about, and drew it out. Between his fingers he held a slip of folded paper. He brushed from his eyes the bandage, settled his glasses into place, and took another sip of absinth.

"Now we shall see what we shall see," he said.

"Ah," murmured Jimmy Jurgens, "an' you've got to see thirteen."

"Attention!" exclaimed Goulet, in his high voice, as he unfolded the slip of paper. "The fortunate winner of the fowl finale—is the holder of tick-et numbaire—gar"—he grinned deliberately, pretending to be unable to make it out—the result being a dramatic pause that quickened the tension to the breaking point—"gar. What is the matter with me? Do I go blind? Numbaire—numbaire——"

"Thirteen," cried Jimmy Jurgens, quite unable to contain himself. The crowd laughed, but immediately sobered.

"Aha," laughed old Goulet, "I have it! It is *thir-ty,* not thirteen. You were too soon, my friend."

Jimmy grunted in despair. As Jacques Desparde, the last of the lucky winners, was hustled up to the bar to get his prize, and practically to pay for it in treats, Jimmy slouched out of the door, and stood without, blinking into the night.

"Hang the luck!" growled Jimmy. "I just naturally had to have that turkey, an' I was sure of gettin' it. When a man has got to have a turkey, he's got to have it, that's all."

"You have got to have a turkey, then," said a voice in his ear.

Jimmy started. He had not noted that the stranger had followed him. Yet here he was, a dim shadow at Jimmy's side.

Jimmy exploded into confidences. "Bo," said Jimmy, in the vernacular of the States, "let me tell you how it is. I never break a promise. You see? Well, the last time I wrote down to the States—it was before the strike—I wrote to Rosalie——"

"Rosalie?" queried the stranger.

"My girl," Jimmy went on doggedly, for he had to tell somebody about it—"my girl, and I said: 'Rosalie,' I said, 'I'm coming home for Thanksgiving, and you can tell your ma that she needn't lay herself out. The cost of living is too high,' I said. 'I'll fetch you the biggest Canadian turkey that I can find,' I said.

He paused, and drew his hand across his eyes.

"Yes?" suggested the other man.

"Well, that ain't all. I made a fool of myself. I said to Rosalie that I had the best, blamedest kind of a job up here at L'Hommedieu's paper works—and that when I came down Thanksgiving I was going to bring her back—her and the old lady. Understand?"

The stranger nodded sympathetically. "You were going to see that you had much to be thankful for, eh? A bride and a mother-in-law."

Jimmy gritted his teeth. "And then this here strike. It's broke me, and it's made me break my promises to a girl that I've never disappointed. Do you see me bringing her back here next week? Do you see me taking back a turk? Say, look a here, stranger, honest Injun, d'ye know what I came down to? Me, Jimmy Jurgens, that's never out of a good job! Hard pan I came to. And when I counted up, what did I have? My fare home—all right. My meals home—all right. What else? Just an even half dollar, bo. Think of that. That's why I took a chance on Goulet. That's why I thought I couldn't lose. You can't buy a five-dollar turkey with half a dollar any other way——"

The stranger looked at his watch. "You can't buy a five-dollar turkey *that* way, Mr.—er—Jurgens," he said, jerking his thumb toward the interior of Michele Goulet's place. "For, listen—a word in your ear. I've got a hunch—a positive hunch, you understand, that Goulet's ten turkeys go, not by chance, but by design, to ten picked men——"

"What ten picked men?" asked Jimmy, aghast.

"Mike Goulet's ten best customers," returned the stranger, as he turned the corner and disappeared from sight.

Jimmy Jurgens, shrugging his shoul-

ders at fate, slouched slowly down the street. He noted by the tower clock that he had two hours' time to catch the boat for home.

"Gee!" sighed Jimmy Jurgens, "only a few more days to turkey day, and no turkey and no money, and no wife and no job. I've got a bunch of things to be thankful for—I *don't* think. Cuss the luck!"

He brought up, all standing, before a brilliantly lighted poultry shop. Here, instead of ten turkeys, there were hundreds—big, little, fat, slim, but all good —and Jimmy knew good turkeys when he saw them. He stood and watched—watched sleek, well-fed purchasers get out of sleighs and waddle in, and pick out heavy, sleek, well-fed birds, just like themselves; watched the purveyor tuck the birds away under lap robes, and watched the customers dash off amid a shower of snow to the tune of merry sleigh bells.

"Cuss the luck!" repeated Jimmy Jurgens.

He had uttered this pleasing sentiment aloud for the twentieth time, when a man brushed against him, wheeled about, angrily at first, and then uttered an exclamation of surprise.

"Why don't you look where you're going?" growled Jimmy. "It ain't my fault. It's yours."

The other man looked at him sharply. His anger cooled. He nodded pleasantly. "I beg pardon," he exclaimed, "but you're one of L'Hommedieu's strikers, are you not?"

Jimmy nodded. "I had to be," he returned. "The committee said: 'Go out,' and I had to go."

The other man—a tall, bluff, commanding-looking man he was, and fairly well dressed—shook his head sympathetically. "Bad season of the year, I admit," he went on, "but——"

"Maybe," said Jurgens resentfully, "you're one of the committee."

The other man did not answer the question. He merely pursued the conversation in his own way. "It has been," he said, speaking in precise tones that somewhat belied his bulk and his bluff appearance, "the custom of L'Hommedieu, at this season, to give each employee a turkey to take home."

"That's the custom in the States," conceded Jimmy; "but I've been at L'Hommedieu's only for about ten months. All right. What then? He ain't handin' out turkeys to his strikers, is he?"

The bluff individual smiled. "Hardly," he returned; "but the committee has seen fit to keep up the practice in his stead."

Jimmy stared at him agape. "You don't mean to say," he gasped, "that I've got a turkey coming to me?"

The other seized him by the arm. "You come with me," he said.

For blocks they walked in silence, now uphill, now down, now in the full glare of well-lighted streets, now through dark and dingy alleys. Finally the big man halted.

"This," he announced, in a low voice, "is headquarters for the distribution."

He held Jimmy Jurgens in his grasp for one instant, while he took a swift and furtive look up and down the narrow thoroughfare.

"Now," he whispered, suddenly pushing Jimmy into the doorway, "come with me."

Jimmy blindly obeyed. Half dragged by the other man, and half groping his own way along, he crept through the black passageway. Once more he was halted, and his companion rapped sharply on a door. He rapped twice, then waited, then rapped twice again.

Some one inside a room crossed the floor and approached the door.

"Well?" said a voice, and Jimmy started, for it was a woman's voice—a low, sweet, well-modulated voice.

His companion audibly twisted the handle of the door. "L'Hommedieu," he said.

It seemed, somehow, a password, for the door opened, and they went in.

Jimmy Jurgens blinked in the glare of the light. Once in, he turned to his escort.

"You—you're not L'Hommedieu," he said suspiciously. "I've seen L'Hommedieu, and I've never seen you before."

"Who said I was L'Hommedieu?" queried the other.

"You said so just now," answered Jimmy, referring to the password.

But his escort only smiled, and closed the door and locked it.

For the first time, Jimmy looked about the room—looked more particularly at the woman in the room. Save for Jimmy and his new-found friend, she was alone. She had retreated to a little table upon which stood a student's lamp, with a green shade above it—a green shade which threw most of the room into darkness.

"You are Mr. Jurgens," said a low voice—the woman's.

Jimmy started. He looked intently at her. She was very beautiful in his eyes—a slender, well-set-up woman, with a well-poised head and pleasant, frank, brown eyes. She was dressed in a tight-fitting dress of dark material.

He had never seen her before. He had never seen this bluff stranger before. Yet, somehow, they knew him—the woman was repeating his name deliberately, incisively——

"You are Mr. Jurgens, of Halcyon, New York? You are one of the strikers at L'Hommedieu's? You are going home—back to the States—back to the States?"

"Yes," blurted out Jimmy suddenly. "Right. I'm Jurgens. I'm a striker, all right——"

He stopped. His eyes fell upon a huge twenty-five-pound turkey that was reposing on a chair. It was better than any of the ten at Goulet's.

"And," persisted the woman gently, "you are going home—back to the States?"

Jimmy nodded, his eyes still on the fowl. "Bet your life, miss, that I'm going back to the States——"

"Wait!" cried the woman. "How do you know that I am 'miss'?"

She seemed to make a point of it, somehow; and Jimmy stammered his apologies. "I should have said 'missus,'" he explained. He drew from his pocket his steamer and railroad combination ticket, and exhibited them. Why he did it, he didn't know, but she seemed, somehow, to expect it.

"By the way," said the bluff individual at the door, "we may be keeping Mr. Jurgens—if he's going home to-night."

"I am," said Jimmy, his eyes now upon the turkey, and now upon the woman at the table; "but I've got lots of time. What did you want of me, ma'am?"

The woman did not answer right away. She sat for a moment staring into space, biting her lips, thinking hard. Finally she tossed her head.

"Good friend," she exclaimed, to the bluff individual, "will you do the honors, if you please?"

The other man strode to a cupboard in the corner and threw open a door. Jimmy caught a glimpse of a number of bulging paper bags. Almost immediately the big man shut the cupboard door and swung himself about; and, with that motion, he swung upon the table one of the largest birds that Jimmy Jurgens had ever gazed upon.

"A little token of esteem," trilled the lady, "from the committee to Mr. James Jurgens, striker of L'Hommedieu's."

Jimmy's breath was taken away almost. "It's—it ain't for me," he cried.

"For no one else," replied the lady; and Jimmy thought he detected the least bit of French accent in her voice, though at the start he had taken her for one from the States. "It is yours—to eat—to do with as you will."

Jimmy stood stupidly regarding it. Then coyly he placed his hand upon it—pinched it to see if it was real.

"It's a sure good bird," he said. Suddenly he started. "Why," he went on, "it's fixed up just like the raffled fowls at Goulet's."

"Is it?" queried the lady. "How is it—and who is Goulet?"

Jimmy explained. "Goulet's had these four rosettes of tissue paper stuck on—just like this. Two on the breast and two on the legs. Just like Goulet's; only there wasn't a bird there that was as big as this. This must be a thirty-pounder if it weighs an ounce."

"Twenty-seven pounds," said the big man pleasantly. He, too, placed his hand upon the bird in some sort of huge caress; and, in so doing, he turned over in full view a tag upon its leg. At the sight of the tag, Jurgens drew back.

"Why," he exclaimed, "this bird *did* come from Goulet's, after all!"

So it would seem, for the tag was one of Goulet's tags, such as he reserved to tie upon quart packages, and upon cases, and upon hampers, when he sold hampers, if ever.

"But," persisted Jimmy, "there was not a bird like this at Goulet's."

The big man shrugged his shoulders. "This may be the eleventh bird," he said.

It was some time later when Jimmy, mystified but happy, left the place. The big man escorted him, quite cautiously, to the entrance of the dark thoroughfare.

"You have just time to catch the boat," he said to Jimmy, as they parted.

And Jimmy traveled in a bee line, so far as was possible, for his wharf.

But, strange to say, he traveled not alone. Quite unknown to him, no sooner had he left the dark alleyway—no sooner had he plunged down the street toward his destination, than two shadows detached themselves from other shadows, and followed him—stopping when he stopped, going on when he went on.

Once only, as he turned the corner, did a strange thing happen. Jimmy came face to face, not with the lady, not with the big, bluff individual—but with the stranger he had encountered in Goulet's café.

"Hello!" cried Jimmy, in delight.

The other looked at him quite blankly. "I beg your pardon, sir."

Jimmy grunted with pleasure. "I'm the duck who held thirteen in Mike Goulet's place."

The stranger laughed with him. "Sure you are," he said; "and what have you there? I thought you missed bird number ten."

"This," said Jimmy, "is bird number eleven."

The stranger walked with him quite openly until they reached a dark spot in the street. Then he halted. "Friend," he said, "will you do me a favor, if you please?"

"Sure," replied Jimmy, wondering.

"Kindly go on ahead of me," went on the stranger, "as though you were alone. Another thing. No matter when or where you see me to-night, or any time, please do not speak to me, nor recognize me. It is a strange request, but quite important. Do you mind?"

"Not at all," said Jimmy. He swung on his heel and disappeared into the darkness. When he turned about and looked behind him, his erstwhile friend had disappeared.

As Jimmy stepped aboard the gangplank a short time afterward, it suddenly occurred to him that the stranger of the Goulet café might possibly have some unknown, mysterious connection with the big man and the handsome woman of the committee room.

The more he thought about it, the more everything became clear; and he felt a little angry over it at that. Undoubtedly the stranger of the café was a philanthropist—undoubtedly he was accustomed to do good in secret, and he had tried to do Jimmy good. Jimmy had wanted a turkey. The stranger had furnished it—in his own way. And he had carefully avoided any connection with it, too—and the possibility of any thanks.

"Wouldn't have taken it if I'd known it was charity," grumbled Jimmy to himself. He felt unaccountably like one of the poor that the religious papers always talk about.

"This turk is going to taste like a mission home," he said.

But at that instant somebody clapped him on the back. "Hey," cried a genial voice; "see you're one of Goulet's lucky ten."

This remark emanated from another total stranger; but Jimmy was glad to respond to it. "I sure won out—a thirty-pounder, too."

But, from the instant that the steamer cast off from her dock, Jimmy felt extremely uncomfortable. It

seemed to him constantly as though he were being watched. Time and again he would turn suddenly to the right or left, and find some one staring him in the face. This some one invariably was buttoned up to the chin for the cold, and usually wore a slouch hat.

"Just looking at the bird," such an individual would say, and slouch away.

Jimmy finally turned into the lower cabin with the crowd. He had no berth; and it was his privilege to sit up all night, or to lie down upon the floor.

For a long while he sat up, his head nodding wearily over his huge bird, which he kept tightly clasped in his arms, to prevent its being filched. Drowsy and drowsier he grew, lulled by the motion of the boat, and by the steady sighs and groans of the piston rods. In his dreams, some one seemed to be tugging at his coat—tugging—tugging——

"Wake up!" something seemed to whisper in his ear.

He woke up—with a start. But there was no one whispering—there was no one tugging at his coat. The huge bird, it is true, was slipping from his grasp—a grasp which he renewed. And then——

"By George!" cried Jimmy softly to himself.

For there, wide awake and staring steadily into Jimmy's eyes, and lying prone upon the floor not fifteen feet away, was the big man of the committee room!

"What's *he* doing here?" cried Jimmy to himself.

But the big man never winked an eyelid. He turned over on the other side, and groaned, and began to snore gently like the rest. And Jimmy, wondering, slipped into slumberland once more.

After a while, he found his seat uncomfortable, and gently dropped to the floor, and lay there full length.

He slept for a long, long while; and it was well into the morning when he woke, though still dark. The oil lamps had burned a bit low. Jimmy felt of his huge bird, to be sure it was safe. And then he looked toward the spot where the big man had been resting.

The man was gone.

"Funny note," thought Jimmy.

He made up his mind that he had merely dreamed of the presence of this man upon the boat. The more he thought about it, the more he was sure it was a dream. His glance traveled over the forms of every sleeper—there was none to answer the description. Jimmy yawned. He looked dreamily at the clock on the stairway, at the gilt decorations on the gallery rail——

And then his brain reeled. For there, in the gallery above, leaning over the rail, clad in a long cloak that enveloped her from head to foot, was the woman of the night before—the lady of the strikers' committee room.

She was looking—not at him, but at the turkey by his side; looking quite intently. A movement on his part caught her eye, and she looked him full in the face. Then, suddenly placing her finger at her lips, she turned, and disappeared.

"Well, of all the queer notes!" thought Jimmy. "I believe they're afraid I'll drink this turkey up instead of eating it."

"Well," said Jimmy Jurgens to Rosalie and Rosalie's mother, as he stamped into their little four-room house in Halcyon the next evening, "I said I'd fetch you a turkey as was a turkey, and here he is."

Rosalie's mother inspected it discreetly, while Rosalie crept—as only Rosalie knew how—into the arms of Jimmy Jurgens.

"I've waited for you a long, long while, Jimmy," said Rosalie. Her hand, a soft, warm little hand, crept up about Jimmy's neck. "I'm glad—glad—glad——"

"This *is* a turkey, Jimmy," said Rosalie's mother. "Where in all did you get a bird like that?"

"Up where they grow 'em," responded Jimmy; "and I paid a fortune for him, too—a small fortune, I tell you——"

He stopped. "What's that?" he exclaimed.

It was a strange sound—coming from

without. A swishing sound, as of a sudden rush of wind.

"Sounded like a machine," said Rosalie.

"Didn't make noise enough," remarked Jimmy.

"Listen!" echoed Rosalie's mother. "What is *that?*"

Jimmy strode to the door, and opened it. Then he started back. In the light of the lamp, tall and slender in the open door, there stood a woman—the woman of the committee room.

"What do you want?" asked Jimmy, recoiling.

The woman's eyes fixed themselves, first upon Jimmy, and then upon the bird upon the table. Jimmy's glance went beyond her, into the road, where, in the dim shadows, there stood a motor car, silent and without lights.

Rosalie and her mother stood transfixed. The woman in the doorway suddenly swayed and covered her hands with her eyes. She would have fallen save for some one who stood behind her—a man. This man caught her deftly, dragged her to a chair—left her there, and darted back and closed the door.

"I want Jurgens," said this man.

Jimmy recoiled. *"You!"* gasped Jimmy. It was the stranger who had accosted him in Goulet's.

"Yes—me," went on the man crisply. "You remember me, don't you?"

"Yes," replied Jimmy; "and you told me—not to speak to you."

The man jerked his head. "That's all over now," he said. "The point is—do you know this woman?"

"Yes," whispered Jimmy, awestruck.

Rosalie and her mother turned upon Jimmy Jurgens. "Who is this woman?" they inquired.

"I don't know," faltered Jimmy. "That's what I want to know myself."

The man stepped to the table. "I'll tell you who she is," he said, "in just half a minute. We'll see whether she tells the truth."

He whipped from his pocket a sharp, small hunting knife. He seized the twenty-seven-pound turkey by the breast bone. Swiftly he drew from its flesh the four tissue-paper rosettes that still clung to it. Then cautiously he inserted the point of his sharp knife in the small hole left by the skewer that held the rosette; and, with a short, swift swish, he laid bare a luscious bit of uncooked white meat.

"Ah," he exclaimed, with a sight of satisfaction, "she's right! Here they are."

He turned to Rosalie. "Have you got a spoon?" he asked.

Rosalie, wondering, brought him one. He inserted it in the incision he had made, and, in another instant, he had turned out upon the surface of the oil-cloth-covered table a dozen large-sized bits of glittering glass.

"What are those?" asked Jimmy.

"Diamonds," said the man at the table, making another incision, using his spoon, and once more turning out a dozen gems. Twice more he performed this delicate operation. His eyes glittered as he glanced upon the stones.

"All of the first water, too!" he cried, with a strange, exultant ring in his voice.

"How did they get there?" queried Jurgens.

The man jerked his thumb toward the woman. "She did it," he said. "Injected them—through a tube, just like you would inject morphine. I suspected her. Somebody whispered 'Turkey' in my ear—and I watched 'turkeys.'"

"And who is *she?*" asked Rosalie of Jimmy, with a tinge of uncertain jealousy in her voice.

Jimmy did not answer.

The stranger of Goulet's did. "She is a thief—I am a jeweler of—of Canada. She—my private secretary—bookkeeper. She stole these, and thought she could make a get-away. I followed—suspected. Here I am."

Jimmy touched the woman on the shoulder in spite of Rosalie. "Is—is this true?" he stammered.

The woman still hid her face. "Yes," she answered, in a voice vibrant with some emotion, possibly shame, "it is."

"All right, sir," said Jimmy. "She gave me the turkey, and if the goods were yours and she says so, why, take them along. I'm glad you've got 'em.

I thought there was a nigger in the woodpile somewhere."

The stranger pocketed his gems, gave the trembling woman his reluctant support, and half led, half pushed her out of the door.

Jimmy held the door wide open for them; and, as he peered into the darkness, he thought he recognized the burly figure in the chauffeur's seat. At that distance, in the darkness, it seemed as though the driver of the car were the big, bluff confederate—yes, that must be the name—confederate of the lady of the night before. Obeying a sudden impulse, he darted out and peered into the driver's face.

"Say, you——" he began. But at that instant the other man dragged the woman into the machine, clutched her wrists tightly, and nudged the big man with his elbow.

"Go on!" he cried, in a low voice. "Good-by."

"Say," cried Jimmy, "you haven't any lights."

"Good-by," cried the man again. In an instant, the car leaped into life, sped down the dark road, and was lost to sight.

Jimmy came slowly back to the house. "What is the big chap driving for?" he said wonderingly. "He—he must be a thief, too—he must——"

But by this time Rosalie and her mother were confronting him. "You said," they demanded, "that she gave you the turkey—when—where—how did it——"

Jimmy threw up his hands. "I'll tell you everything," he cried.

"You had better," incisively exclaimed Rosalie.

He held his head in his hands. "It's this way," he said dejectedly. "I wasn't going to tell you until after to-morrow. I didn't want to spoil a holiday, but now I——"

"Wait a minute," cried Rosalie's mother, in alarm. "What is *that?*"

"Another automobile," said Jimmy. "Wait till it stops its noise, and I'll tell you."

But the machine, with a grating sound that sent the chill into their bones, drew up swiftly before the house, and there was a loud rat-tat on the door. An instant later, a businesslike individual was showing them a shield attached to his suspender.

"United States Secret Service," he explained. "We have traced two men and a woman to this town—in fact, to this house. Where are they hid?"

"Hid nowhere," said Jimmy; "they've just gone."

The officer looked Jimmy squarely in the face. "Are you telling me the truth?" he demanded.

"Sure," replied Jimmy. "They've just speeded up the road."

The Secret Service man never looked at the bird upon the table, though afterward he heard all about it. He blew on his whistle, and Lighthipe, the local constable, darted in.

"Mr. Constable," said the Secret Service man, "are these people all O. K.?"

"Right as a trivet," said the constable. "I'll take an oath on that. Known 'em for years."

"All right," said Secret Service, "then we'll toddle on." He glanced sharply at Rosalie, her mother, and again at Jimmy Jurgens.

"You know who these people were?" he asked.

Jimmy answered. "The woman was a thief, and the other chap had caught her. Fortunately he got the goods."

Secret Service snorted. "Thief!" he cried, pausing on the threshold. "There ain't a thief among that crowd. Just guess again."

"Give it up," said Jimmy.

"Those," said the Secret Service man superciliously, "are the slickest smugglers—diamond smugglers—in existence. New York is too hot for them just now—they have to take the long way around Canada and across the line. Their name is Logerot."

It was after the preliminary examination at the United States Commissioners next morning—the examination of Jimmy Jurgens, for the Logerots had escaped so far, and after Jimmy had been discharged on his own recog-

nizance for his innocent part in the affair—that the postmaster called to him as he passed with Rosalie.

"Telegram for you, Jim," said the postmaster, handing it out.

Jimmy Jurgens took it, and tore it open eagerly. Then he grabbed Rosalie in his arms—right in the middle of the road, and danced her about in glee.

"Jerusalem! Just look at that!" he said.

Rosalie read the telegram.

Strike settled. Report ready for work Monday. COMMITTEE.

That was all it said.

"I didn't even know there'd been a strike, Jimmy!" she exclaimed.

"Something I was holding back till after to-day," he said.

Three hours later, under the genial influence of white meat, dark meat, dressing, gravy, and cranberry sauce, and lots of crisp, brown skin, Jimmy darted an amorous glance toward his fiancée.

"Well," he said jocularly, "the gems I smuggled over ain't a marker to the jewel that I'm going to smuggle back. Mother," he exclaimed, "gimme one more hunk, and then I'm through."



THE TEST OF A GOOD ACTOR

JAMES THORNTON, the monologuist, was walking down Broadway one evening when he saw, leaning against a lamp-post, an individual who was evidently an actor just off the road. Equally apparent was the fact that the man needed a job or money.

"How do you do, my friend?" greeted Thornton.

The stranded actor, recognizing Thornton, spoke to him a trifle sadly.

"Need a job?" asked Thornton.

"I do—badly," answered the actor.

"What have you done?"

"A lot of work," explained the other, his face brightening at the prospect of Thornton's taking an interest in him. "I've done all sorts of rôles in stock companies."

"Ever play the part of a Mexican?"

"Oh, yes."

"Pretty good at it, weren't you?"

"Well, if I do say it myself, Mr. Thornton, I think I played the Mexican in fine shape."

"That being the case," responded Thornton, handing him tobacco and a cigarette paper, "roll me a cigarette."

The man who had made such a hit as a Mexican made a miserable failure of the cigarette. And Thornton, observing this fact, resumed his stroll, leaving the stranded actor still stranded.

ANOTHER VIEW OF MATRIMONY

COLONEL FRANK P. MORGAN, of New York and other cities, was discussing with a group of friends the current news of the day.

"I see by the papers," remarked one, "that the Prince of Wales will have to select his bride from among only seven girls."

"Which is pretty tough stuff," commented the colonel. "In this country a majority of the best people have already divorced that many."

An Unsung Hero

By Berton Braley

THEY have told you for years of the "brave engineers,"
  Who pilot the trains to the station;
And they've caroled to you of the "overalls blue,"
  The badge of a worthy vocation.
Now *I'm* full of praise for the engineers' ways,
  And to glorify them none is quicker,
Yet let me be heard as I venture a word
  For the man at the telegraph ticker.

  Clickety-click! Clickety-click!
Hear how the instruments chatter and dicker.
  Daytime and night, swifter than light,
Orders for trains from the man at the ticker!

The engineer's brain is concerned with one train,
  Dispatchers must think about many,
And to handle the lot with the Morse dash-and-dot
  Needs a head that is equal to any.
So the engineer smiles as he reels off the miles
  With his train orders fresh as he takes 'em;
But the *hero* to me is the man at the key,
  The nervy dispatcher who makes 'em.

  Clickety-click! Clickety-click!
There goes the Limited—flash and a flicker—
  One little hitch—train in the ditch!
Nice ticklish task to be man at the ticker.

When the flood's running high and the train card's awry,
  And the schedule's busted to flinders,
He must "get the line clear" for the trains far and near,
  No matter what obstacle hinders!
Till the tangle is straight he is "Boss," he is Fate,
  There is no one to question or bicker.
Whether four tracks or one, all the traffic is run
  By the man at the telegraph ticker.

  Clickety-click! Clickety-click!
"Send on the wrecker at once if not quicker,
  Train's jumped the rails!" somebody wails,
Action's the word for the man at the ticker!

It's a big game of chess with no "chances" or "guess,"
  And the board is a busy division,
For a move that is wrong might be death to a throng
  In a smash or a head-on collision.
Your life's in his hand when you travel on land,
  And as heroes are measured, his stature
Will loom up right near to the "brave engineer,"
  I drink to the nervy dispatcher!

  Clickety-click! Clickety-click!
Wife may be sick and the baby be sicker;
  Still he must stick right at his "trick,"
Here's to the man at the telegraph ticker!

The Darragh Clurichawn

By Francis Lynde

Author of "The Taming of Red Butte Western," "The Pan-Americans," Etc.

Darragh, the man at the throttle of the 809, was all right till an enemy put the "black curse" on him. Perhaps he should have laughed when the Clurichawn—the little old dwarf with the long white beard—confronted him. But Darragh hailed from Enniskillen and the fear of death gripped him. The mysticism in the blood of the Celtic race dies hard.

JACK DARRAGH'S luck had come to be a proverb on the Timanyoni Division long before the P. S. W. captured the contract for carrying the China mails—which was also before the rush order was placed for the ten new locomotives to be assigned to the Red Butte Western district for the handling of the mail-train flyer.

The luck was not merely ordinary good fortune. It figured rather as a striking example of the good will of the gods. While he was still a fireman, three wrecks, in each of which his engineer had been killed, left him unscathed. When he got his first freight run, the miracles continued. A broken rail in the Red Desert obligingly stayed in place until his entire train had passed over it in safety, flicking over into the ditch only when the last pair of wheels under the caboose had given it a final kick.

Next, a softened embankment in the Tumbling Water flats dropped a foot or more one flood-tide morning just as his engine struck it, but the big mogul—and again the entire train—teetered around the brink of disaster and came out whole, with Darragh looking back out of his cab window and laughing at the other members of the crew turning handsprings in the ditch in a mad *sauve qui peut.*

Farther along, when he had been promoted to a passenger run, there were more of the striking dissertations upon the maxim that it is better to be born lucky than rich. Once, when he was racing the day express down the western grades in the Crosswater Hills, the off-shift dispatcher went to sleep on the job and let the Denver Limited pass the last station at which he could have given it a "meet" order with Darragh's belated train.

With anybody but Lucky Darragh at the throttle of the 809, there would have been a head-on collision and much carnage—at least, that was what everybody said. But, when the trains were within an easy mile of each other, Darragh saw the smoke of the Limited rising above one of the lower hill shoulders, and made his stop, timing it deftly on a bit of straight track so that his fireman had all the topographies in his favor when he made his frantic sprint with the red flag.

Still farther along, there was the incident of the falling bowlder in Timanyoni Cañon. It happened just at sundown, and again Darragh was pulling the day express.

At the curve in the crooked cañon, just above the sheer cliff that rises perpendicularly from the torrent's bed to the first bench of Mount Fernando,

Darragh saw a huge mass of rock spring clear from the overhanging edge of the six-hundred-foot precipice.

One glimpse he had of it in the level rays of the setting sun; and the glimpse assured him that the falling bowlder was due to drop upon the track, either just ahead of his train or upon it.

Another man might have disregarded the steep down grade and the laws of momentum and tried to stop. But Darragh was daring as well as lucky, and he knew that his only chance lay in trying to underrun the falling rock.

With the brakes off and the throttle jerked wide, he stormed around the indented curve of hazard in a hailstone shower of pebbles dislodged by the main mass at its first slipping; and a bunch of tourists, crowding the back platform of the rear sleeper for the matchless cañon view, saw the meteoric death miss them by a scant train length; saw the huge projectile bury itself in the embankment, crushing the heavy steel over which they had just passed as if the rails had been a double line of wheat straws.

This time Darragh had to run the gamut of gratitude. The tourists, and some others, made up a purse for him on the spot, but he would not take it.

"What for should I be swipin' your good money when I've got a roll o' me own in the Brewster Savings Bank?" he protested, with the good-natured laugh that had made him friends from one end of the division to the other. " 'Tis well thought of, and I'm obliged to yez. But ye shouldn't be taking it so har-rd. Sure, 'tis all in the day's work, annyhow."

And then, the flagmen having been posted above and below the avalanched curve, he told the grateful ones that they would better be getting aboard, since he was about to pull out for Brewster and the end of his run.

It was perhaps a month later that Superintendent Maxwell and MacFarland, the trainmaster, met in the dispatcher's office to go for the final time over the "stringing" of the new schedule, which was to include the daily shuttle flight of the fast mail.

"If they'll only get those new engines here in time," Maxwell was saying. "We're going to be frightfully short of the right kind of motive power if they don't, Mac."

"That's so," agreed the trainmaster. "We're going to be short on power, and a good bit shorter on men—the kind of men it's going to take to run that train and make its time."

"What's that?" demanded the boss. "I thought you had your list filled out."

"It was filled out—until Darragh went back on me."

"Lucky Darragh?" queried Maxwell. "What's the matter with him?"

MacFarland, American transplanted while he was yet young, was still enough of a Scotchman to wear a pair of tufty little side whiskers, which he was given to absently stroking the wrong way of the grain in moments of perplexity.

"He's clean daft, I'm thinking," he said. "You know his record, and how good it is. The men call him 'Lucky'; but the full half of it is a cool head and that blessed gift of judgment that tells a man when to take a chance and when to dodge, and doesn't use up more than the inside fraction of a second in the telling."

"Well?" said Maxwell questioningly.

"When I told him he was slated for one of the new engines and a mail run, he went white to the ears, and began to stammer out something about having come up to the office to ask if I wouldn't put him back on a freight trick."

"Oh, piff!" scoffed the superintendent. "That is some of Kitty Clare's nonsense! Kinney, my new shorthand man, gets his meals at the lunch counter now and then, and Kitty has been pumping him to try to find out if Darragh was going to be put on the fast train. Kinney says she is scared stiff for fear Jack's luck will turn and he won't live long enough to marry her."

MacFarland was comparatively new to Brewster and the Red Butte Western, and he cocked his ear—his Scotch ear—apprehendingly.

"So that's it, is it?" he snorted. "That's why Darragh never opens his

pay envelope till he gets to the savings bank with it? Kitty's a good girl, but she shouldn't be trying to chock the wheels of the service. I'll have a word or two with Pat Clare about that."

"You'll do nothing of the sort, Mac," said the superintendent, whose own first baby was just old enough to run to the gate to meet him when he went home after the day's work. "Of course, we'll swing Darragh into line. He's too good a man to take the back track in his trade for the anxious fears of the little lunch-counter girl. But we won't mess or meddle in the little girl's love affair—not any."

This talk in the dispatcher's office befell only a few days before the deliveries of the new locomotives began, and something less than a fortnight before the new time card was to go into effect. For reasons wholly mysterious to the roundhouse contingent at Brewster, and to the railroad colony at large, Lucky Darragh was still trying to fight off his promotion on the very eve of its materialization; was still begging, so MacFarland reported, for a transfer to one of the slow freights.

Gossip—the gossip of the roundhouse tool room and the yard shanties—commented curiously and variously on young Darragh's sudden change of heart. From having been the most ambitious man in the service, he was apparently going to the opposite extreme.

"Needn't tell me," said Broadbent, the fat machinist, who filed and fitted brasses in the roundhouse repair shop; "he's lost his nerve—that's what's the matter of him. He's never been the man he useter be since that night, a month 'r so ago, when he pulled Number Two through the crossover in the upper yard with the signals set ag'inst him."

"How come him to do that?" queried Latham, a back-shop man, who had lately been assigned to Broadbent as his helper and extra fitter. "I nev' did get the straight o' that."

"Gawd only knows—an' He won't tell," grunted the fat one. "Jenksy, in the block tower, had opened the switches f'r the shifter to get out with a string o' boxes. He hadn't ort to done it on Two's leavin' time; but, anyhow, he did do it. Lucky pulled out on the dot, as he always does, and was shakin' her up to a thirty-mile tune when he hit the crossover. Jenksy heerd him a-comin' and set the 'distance' ag'inst him. He underrun that without ever shettin' off, and, when he come to the red-light 'home,' he went under that, too."

Clay, the lank Kentuckian who pulled the Limited with the biggest compound on the division, put down the oil cup he was clearing with a wire and grinned appreciatively.

"Darragh's tolerably sure to have his luck along with him, whatever he does," he commented. "That shiftin' engine didn't have any back lights like the Book o' Rules says she ort to; but, just as Two was takin' the crossover, the shifter fireman happens to yank open his fire-box door. Lucky couldn't he'p seein' that; and he saw it quick enough to give him time to make an emergency stop and a back-away, I reckon."

"Just the same, I'm tellin' you fellahs that Lucky's lost his sand; and that's the reason why he don't want to pull no train scheduled up to a mile a minute, with a five-hundred-dollar fine for not makin' the time," insisted Broadbent.

Thus ran the comment in the roundhouse tool room; and elsewhere in the Brewster railroad gathering places the story was much the same. John Darragh, the lucky one and the pride of the Timanyoni Division, had lost his nerve, and with it his ambition. The men were sorry; but among the women there was a disposition to pity Bridge Foreman Clare's daughter, and to wonder how she could stand it.

On the evening of the second day preceding the installation of the new time card, Darragh, who was still running odd and even on the day express, came into Brewster two hours late; the delay, however, being due to a freight wreck on the P. S. W. main line, which had added the two hours to his Copah leaving time.

Turning his engine over to Gaston, the night hostler, at the Brewster station platform, Darragh, big and shape-

less as a deep-sea diver in his jumper and overalls, swung into the station waiting room and put a leg over one of the high stools at the otherwise deserted lunch counter.

Behind the counter, a dainty slip of a girl, with swimming blue eyes and a face pretty enough to distract attention from the thick pompadour roll which Brewster fashion of the moment prescribed as the proper coiffure, came tripping to serve him.

"Oh, Jack, dear—I'm *that* glad!" she said. "I sent Tommie up to Mr. Crandall's office two hours ago, and he came back with a word that it was only a freight wreck that was holding you; but I couldn't be sure. They'd be telling a boy anything they pleased."

"It was a freight smash—somewhere back on the main line," said Darragh. "We was all of the two hours late leavin' Copah. But I've had a scare, Kitty, girl."

"I knew it—the first minute I laid eyes on you coming in at the door," she quavered. And then: "Tell me, John. The ham and eggs'll be up in a minute. I ordered your supper when I heard the Eight Nine's whistle in the upper yards."

Darragh pointed a big forefinger at the steaming coffee urn.

"Draw me one first," he said. "I'm shakin' from it yet like a man with the ague." And, when the coffee came, he drank it down black and hot in thirsty swallows.

"It was at Timanyoni Siding," he told her when she removed the cup and saucer and was preparing another to go with the ham and eggs when they should come. "I saw the Timanyoni signals from the cañon mouth as plain as I can see your pretty eyes this blessed minute, Kitty. I looked again to make sure while we was comin' down the grade to the sidin'. You know the rules—the operator holds red against you till he hears your whistle; and then, if he has no orders, he gives you the go-by with a couple of wigwags—red to white and back again."

"I know," she nodded.

"Billy Carter was firin', and he was hangin' out o' the window on his own side o' the cab when I pulled the whistle. You know the racket the Eight Nine can make with the full head of steam; and I gave 'er all of it, thinkin' the operator must be asleep or crazy to be leaving his white signals out for annybody and everybody that might come along. When we got nearer, I saw the white light turnin' to a kinda sickly yellow; and just then Billy pops his head in and screeches at me: 'Ain't you goin' to shut off? *He's holdin' the red against you!*'"

"You poor dear!" said the girl, with the love croon in the sweet Irish voice. "You were that tired you couldn't see straight. Don't I know how it is?"

Darragh passed his hand over his eyes.

"'Twas a hot day, this, crossin' the Red Desert, and the sand was blowin'. God knows I saw red enough all the way across from the Hills to Angels. Come night and the black dark in the cañon, and it was like droppin' into a warm bath when you're all in. Just the same, I didn't get Timanyoni's order signal—not even after Billy yelled at me. I just took his word f'r it and made the stop. It was a meet order with Mr. Maxwell's special, and we oughta got it at Angels. If I'd pulled through, as I was goin' to, we'd 'a' got 'em somewhere along about Dry Gulch—a head-ender, with a bunch of us chewed up and steam cooked."

Kitty Clare was a coward for her lover; but she could be bravely unflinching for herself when fear pushed her over the edge into desperation.

"Tell me, John, when was it that you'd be taking the last eye test?" she asked, with the shadow of a great dread in her own limpid eyes.

"The last time Doctor Hudson's car was over the division; 'twas a month ago, wasn't it?"

"And you stood it all right?"

"No man of the bunch of us better. Sure, the doctor was jokin' me about it. He said when the railroad job was played out I could go to sellin' ribbons up in Einstein's department store."

The young woman shook her head.

"I've been afraid—it was—the blindness," she confessed gaspily.

Darragh was looking away through the waiting-room window at the red, white, and green switch lights starring the Brewster yard.

"No. Most times I can see as good as ever I could," he asserted slowly; and then he added: "That's the trouble, Kitty, girl. I can see too good. I've seen my death."

There was a shocked blankness in the pretty face when he let his gloomy eyes seek it again.

"Tell me, John, dear," she whispered softly. "If it's the death you've seen, 'tis mine as well as yours."

Darragh dragged out his watch and scowled at its face.

"You'll be off in five minutes 'r so, if the night girl's on time. Meet me at the roundhouse crossin', and I'll walk over home with you."

"But your supper?" she began. "That's the cook whistling it up the dumbwaiter this minute."

"I ain't hungry any more," said the big engineer; and he slid from the high stool and went away to take off his overclothes.

He found her waiting for him a few minutes later when he came up from the roundhouse; and together they crossed the tracks and the bridge, walking slowly toward the new railroad suburb which had been laid out on the hills north of the river. When there were only the bridge electrics for silent witnesses, he made his confession.

"You'll remember, Kitty, girl, how I tried to tell you, the night o' the Brotherhood picnic, about the black day I'd left behind me up in the Medicine Bow Hills, and ye wouldn't listen?"

She nodded dumbly. "'Twas about another woman, John. I knew it by the way you began. And it came to me quick that it wouldn't be good for me to hear."

"It was another woman," he said soberly. "I was young and girl crazy them days, and she was the kind that would go through the world crookin' her finger at the men. She was Pete Grogan's daughter; and old Pete was foreman of the section that took in the tank and pump station I was chief engineerin'."

"Was she pretty?" asked the girl.

"Not to be walkin' on the same side o' the earth with you, Kitty, darling; and that's God's truth. But she had a look in the black eyes of her, and a way with her that meant annything you like to a wild lad just peekin' over the far edge of his teens. Betwixt and between, there was another man—the foreman of the next section but one—and one night he came down to the tank house and said he was goin' to fight me for her. 'Twas a great scrap, Kitty, dear; and, after the first round, I'm thinkin' we'd both forgot what it was all about. My, my, them old days!" Darragh was looking back at them from the mature and hopelessly senile viewpoint of twenty-seven.

"And then what?" queried the bridge foreman's daughter.

"Then the old man, her father, came to me and said since I'd put a man in the hospital for his daughter, it was f'r me to keep her good name by marryin' her. With that I laughed in his face, and said, says I: 'I will not;' and he went away, cursin' and swearin' outrageous. The next night, or maybe it was two nights beyond that, the woman herself came down to the pump house where I was sittin' on the coal pile watchin' the steam gauge on the donkey boiler. What she said to me I'll never put into your innocent ears, Kitty, darling; but this was the end of it—if I didn't marry her, she'd kill herself."

"Shameless!" said the girl hotly.

"'Twas what I said when I saw how matters stood with her; but you mustn't say it after me, Kitty, dear. It will be the death of you—as it's goin' to be the death o' me one of these fine nights."

"Go on," said Kitty Clare, dry-lipped.

"She went out o' the pump house cryin' that I killed the other man for nothing—but he was neither dead nor caring for her—and put the burnin' shame upon her. Then, out of a dark corner of the tank timberin', her little old daddy jumps up and heaves a track wrench at me, and all in the same breath

Number Seven, the Portland Flyer, whistles for the tank sidin'. One minute past that, me and the old man was standin' over what was left o' the woman. I don't know how it happened; whether she meant to kill herself, or was only tryin' to cross the track ahead of the Flyer. Nobody'll ever know; and the man who was pullin' the throttle on the Flyer never knew that he'd hit anything until they told him at the end of his run."

They had reached the gate in front of the bridge foreman's cottage in the new suburb; but, when Darragh would have lifted the latch, the girl stopped him.

"And what then, John?" she asked; and she made no attempt to hide the shaking horror in her voice.

"Then—then, Kitty, dear, the old man stood up and put the black curse on me. And what he said has come true."

"What was it?—tell me!" she commanded.

"He prayed to God, or to his devil, to let me go on and prosper, and live, and not die until the time might come when I'd see myself havin' all that a man could have, or be wishful to have. Then he turned on me with his yellow teeth showin' in the moonlight, and said, says he: 'You come o' the Darraghs, of Inniskillen; and well do I know the black breed,' says he. 'When you're at the top o' your ladder, look down, me fine lad, and you'll see the Darragh dwarf climbin' up to ye.' "

"Jack!" said the girl. "You don't believe in such things!"

Darragh was leaning against the unopened gate, and the sweat was standing in fine beads on his forehead.

"I did not—then," he asserted. "Nor for a long time this side of that bad night at Dry Creek tank. But before I came to the Timanyoni, I had a week with the old grandfather, who was still livin' in the little shack in the edge of St. Louis, where I was born. I asked him about the dwarf, and he told me. Back in Ireland 'twas the story that a humpbacked, crooked-legged little man with a long white beard always showed himself to any Darragh that was comin' to his death. The old grandfather believed it, but I didn't—then."

Though there was a full generation intervening between Kitty Clare and her Irish-born forbears, the mysticism in the Celtic blood dies hard, and she shivered as one with a chill.

"Have you seen it, John?" she asked, with her heart in her throat.

"Three times, Kitty; and 'twas when I was at the top of the ladder, thinkin' no harm could ever come to me, that it began. Do you mind the night, three weeks ago, when I brought you home—the night when I had to double out extra on Two in Buck Bradford's place? 'Twas that night—when I was leaving you and goin' back across the bridge. I saw it as plain as day; standing under one of the bridge lamps; a crumpled-up scrap of a man, that I took first for a boy playin' tricks in his mother's shawl, till I saw the long white beard of it. Only for the look of it, I'd 'a' broke and run; but, when I took a grip o' myself and made for it, it was gone."

"That was once," said Kitty Clare hurriedly. "And it might have been only a boy playing tricks, after all, Jack."

" 'Twas none so good as that," Darragh went on gloomily. "Two hours past the bridge crossin', I got my orders to go out on Two in Bradford's place. Three train len'ths beyond the platforms, when I was lettin' the Ten Sixteen out a notch 'r two, I saw it again, standing in the middle of the track and wavin' its arms at me. I went crazy, Kitty; stark mad; and, but for the fireman's pullin' me down, I'd 'a' gone, not only against the red of the tower block, but into that switchin' engine."

"And the third time?" said the girl, with a shudder.

" 'Twas this same night we're living in," said Darragh solemnly; "at Timanyoni Siding. The thing was on the track, at the upper switch. I saw it as plain as I can see them bridge electrics this minute. And that time I went crazy, too—so crazy that I couldn't see that Timanyoni was holding the red against me for orders till Billy Carter yelled at me."

Kitty Clare had put one round, white arm on top of the gate palings, and was crying softly into the crook of it.

"And still they'll be making you take the fast mail run," she sobbed brokenly. "'Tis your grandfather and my grandmother—she's always saying that your luck would turn."

It is not often that the man becomes the comforter; but this time Darragh proved the exception.

"Don't cry, Kitty, colleen. The luck's with us yet. Three times have I seen the Darragh dwarf, and twice death has leaped at me. But I've got to be a man, darlin'; and they're all sayin' that Jack Darragh's lost his nerve. Ye couldn't live through that, I'm thinking."

She looked up, crushed by the finality in his tone.

"That means that you're going to take the mail run, after all, Jack, dear?" she faltered.

"I can do no less and be a man."

She was wiping her eyes furtively. "It will be the death of you, John—and of me. When does it begin?"

"The first train through—the 'Flying ing Postal' they'll be callin' it—will be to-morrow night. MacFarland tells me that I'm to take it east with one of the new ten-wheelers."

"I'll be praying for you, dear," she said, with a catch in her voice; and with that she opened the gate and was gone.

As the through schedules had been arranged, it so happened that the first eastward flight of the Flying Postal dovetailed quite accurately with the change of time cards on the Red Butte Western district. The trial-trip train had left San Francisco on time, had held its own over the Sierras, and had actually overrun its schedule some five or six minutes when it was turned over to the P. S. W. system at Lorchi, the western terminus of the Nevada line.

From this time on, Brewster interest in the time-making experiment quickened. Since the new time card, in which the train would have its regular place, would not go into effect until one minute past midnight, the fast mail was running on orders as a "special"; incidentally with the track cleared for it, as if it had been a wrecking train hurrying to a scene of disaster. From time to time reports came clicking through the Brewster sounders. At Latiga, eleven minutes had been lost owing to a hot box under one of the postal cars; but at Sancho, the point at which the steep climb up the western slope of the Hophras begins, ten of the eleven minutes had been regained.

Relay, the first station on the eastern slope, was the next to report; and the little group of trainmen watching the bulletin board in Dispatcher Crandall's office broke into the chattering clamor of the telegraph instruments applausively when the Relay man ticked off the passing of the new train with a loss of only seven minutes on the stiff mountain climb.

"If Barney Giddings don't make it into Brewster on the eight-o'clock dot, it'll be because the wheels won't stay under her," was Buck Bradford's comment; and MacFarland, who had been hanging over the dispatcher's table for the better part of the afternoon, looked up and nodded.

"Giddings'll do it," he said; and then: "Any of you fellows seen Darragh this afternoon?"

Gaston, the night hostler whose trick began at seven, was able to give the required information.

"He's down at the roundhouse tunin' up that new ten-wheeler of his, as if he was due to bu'st all the records on the Short Line."

"Lucky's got it dead easy," put in young Cargill, who was one of the bulletin-board watchers. "He'll catch up with the new card somewheres along about Navajo, in the desert, and with 'regardless' orders up to that, he'll be able to take the Crosswater Hills on a freight schedule, if he wants to."

"Yes; if his nerve holds out," cut in Crawford, a new freight puller from the Oregon country, and a man at whom the Brewster railroad colony was beginning to look askance as a "knocker."

"Shut up!" said Bradford, in low tones; and then it was seen that Dar-

ragh had come in to get the freshest news from the Postal. Whether he had heard Crawford's comment or not, no one knew at the moment; but they were not left long in doubt. Having got the train report from Crandall, Darragh strode across to the group at the bulletin board.

"This is neither the time nor the place, Jim Crawford," he began hotly. "But the day we're both off duty, we'll step across to the shadows on the other side of the Timanyoni, and I'll show you wan or two things about that lost nerve o' mine."

"Aw, give us a rest!" said the Oregonian, who at least had the courage of his rancor. "What I said was only what everybody's sayin'. If the coat don't fit, you needn't wear it."

Darragh turned away without another word. It was true, then, as he had feared. His repute as a fearless runner of fast trains was already assailed, and he had fairly set his feet in the downward path, which, in the railroad service, can so rarely be retraced. Manlike, he craved sympathy. There was a hard night's work ahead; a trial-trip race, in which he would hold the honor and credit of the Short Line in his hand. If he should fail——

He looked at his watch as he went down the corridor. It was seven-fifteen; and the Flying Postal was only forty-five minutes away. He had had his supper, but there was time for a word with Kitty Clare and a cup of coffee at the lunch counter.

When he took his seat on one of the high stools near the coffee urn, it was Bridget Callahan, the night girl, who came to take his order.

"Where's Kitty?" he demanded.

"Didn't you know, then?" was the arch query. "Sure, she's gone and left you, Lucky."

"Gone? Where to?"

"How should I know?" said the substitute teasingly.

"But somebody must know. Has she gone home? Was she sick?"

The night girl had drawn his cup of coffee, and was slamming the accompaniments down in front of him in a way to make him suddenly homesick for Kitty Clare's deft servings.

"No; she's not sick, and she didn't go home. She wint away on Number Six—wid a pass from Misther Maxwell to some place over in the Red Desert, where her mother's brother kapes a cattle ranch. She did be sinding a tillegram first, and that's all I know. Now, then, what will ye be having to go wid the coffee?"

"Nothing," said Darragh; and, when he had absently gulped the black draft without remembering to put either cream or sugar in it, he went out to the east spur, where Gaston was already placing the new 1098 in readiness for the quick coupling when the Flying Postal should arrive.

"How's she handling, Tom?" asked Darragh, when he had climbed to the cab.

"Fine as silk. Foaming a little yet from the grease in her boiler, Baldrick says; but nothing to hurt. They washed her out again with hot water this morning."

"I ain't goin' to turn any crown sheets on this trip," said Darragh mechanically.

He was still thinking of Kitty, and wondering what family misfortune had befallen to make her run away without leaving word for him. Also, he was trying to recall what he knew of the ranchman uncle, whose shipping station was at Navajo, in the very heart of the Red Desert. It was little or nothing. He merely knew that Mrs. Clare had a brother who was a cattleman, and that his ranch was somewhere in the foothills of the Little Vermilions north of Navajo.

After Gaston had gone, and while Carter, the fireman, was putting his lamps and signals in order, Darragh got down to "oil around," a duty which he never intrusted to any one else. Mixed up with the Kitty Clare perplexity was the recollection of what Crawford had said in the dispatcher's office. All through the long afternoon, while he had been tinkering and tuning on the new ten-wheeler, he had been striving to put away the creeping dread inspired

by the fear that the thrice-seen misshapen thing, with its humped back and flowing white beard, would jump out at him from some dark corner of the roundhouse.

And now, as he passed from oil cup to oil cup in his methodical round of the big flyer, the fear was again growing upon him; growing so that he had to force himself to straighten up and look around him now and then to be convinced that the commonplace and familiar surroundings of the Brewster yards were still at hand; that nothing was happening to warrant the unreasoning terror that hung like a millstone about his neck. If he could only have had a word with Kitty before the moment of supreme trial came——

He was climbing to the cab with his oil can, when the fireman leaned out of the window and whispered to him:

"Whisht f'r a minute till I'm heavin' a chunk of coal up on the back end of the tender; there's a ride-stealin' hobo up there hidin' behind the manhole."

Darragh swung himself up to the gangway with a sudden jerk.

"Not for your life, Billy!" he forbade; and then his bones turned to water. If Carter had seen anything, it was no hobo—nor any other human being.

"All the same, I'm goin' to see," said the fireman; and forthwith he disappeared over the piled-up heap of the coal supply. There were sounds of a struggle, a blast of bad language, and a weird scream, and then Carter came back to drop into the gangway.

"'Twas a 'bo!" he panted. "When I told him t' fade away, he grabbed me by the leg."

"Well?" said Darragh, with his heart in his mouth.

"He's gone. I t'rew him off. He was on'y a boy f'r size, but I'm thinkin' he was a man grown f'r all that. Did you hear the screech he let out? Ye'd 'a' thought I was killin' him."

Darragh had heard it, and his nerves were still quivering. Just then the trial-trip mail train, ten minutes late, came thundering through the western yards, with the recalcitrant housing under the second mail car once more blazing to high heaven to account for the lost time. Darragh set his teeth and took his place on the running step. Looking back, he saw Giddings drop from the gangway of the 1098's twin, and saw Gaston swing up to make the cut-out. A minute later, the engine to be relieved came clanking up the main track, with Gaston at the throttle; and Darragh saw, as a man in a dream, the flick of the spur switch from white to red, which was his signal to pull up and couple on.

He did it mechanically, with his eyes fixed upon the section of track illuminated by the dazzling cone of the electric headlight. Nothing happened. The red light of the turned switch burned steadily as he approached and passed it; and, when he looked back, he saw it turn normally to white as the yard switchman gave him the backing signal. With his nerves still on edge, he eased the big ten-wheeler down to a touch coupling with the postal train. While the yardmen were coupling the air hose and linking up the safety chains, he was conscious only of a huge impatience. If they would only let him get away and out of the yards before the Thing showed itself, he would see to it that the fleetest imp in Satan's following should never catch him.

But there was more delay. An emergency crew was hurriedly replacing the defective brass of the hot box under the second car; and the throng of station loungers, gathered to see the fast train go through, massed itself about the hastening workers. Darragh leaned out of his cab window and babbled curses. Five minutes only had been allowed on the special schedule for the engine changing at Brewster; and they were gone, with five more on top of them to add to the ten minutes lost by the late arriving—fifteen minutes to make up, and a promise of more.

Darragh snapped out an order at Carter.

"Get back there and tell them thumb-fingered dope men to get a move on!" he rasped.

Carter obeyed promptly; and, when he was gone, Darragh leaned farther out of his window to get the better look

backward. And because his attention was entirely focused upon the anchoring obstacle to the rear, he missed the sight of a bent and misshapen figure dodging around the front end of the engine; dodging and clambering with monkeylike handholds and footholds to a crouching seat directly under the sizzling headlight.

Before Carter had reached the emergency men, they were pulling the jacks out, and the onlookers were scattering to watch the start. Darragh saw Jenkins, the conductor, coming down the stairs from the dispatcher's room on the jump, with the clearance orders in his hand. Just then the superintendent and MacFarland came up.

"It's up to you, Darragh," shouted Maxwell, bellowing, to make himself heard above the sudden stuttering roar of the 1098's pop valve. "You've got the honor of the Red Butte Western in your hand to-night. Go to it like a man."

Darragh nodded without taking his eyes from the hurrying conductor. Carter, returning from his errand, caught Jenkins in mid flight, and, snatching the duplicate copy of the train order, hurled himself up the engine steps.

"First meet is Number Seventeen, at Angels," he gasped, thrusting the tissue order under Darragh's seat cushion; and, at the clang of the bell, Darragh sent the steam whistling into the cylinders. The pop valve went silent with a sharp *phut!* there was a shuddering grind and a spitting of fire as the six great driving wheels gripped the rails, a sharp *staccato* from the stack, and the Flying Postal shot away through the upper yards, gathering speed at each fresh wheel turn.

Men spoke of the initial night flight of the Postal afterward as a record run for the district, spreading the honor of it out to cover the entire R. B. W. from Lorchi to Copah. By the time the Brewster distance signals were flicking to the rear, Darragh had read his clearance order, and was humped over his levers, nursing the big ten-wheeler up to its speed by all the little arts known to the skilled time cutter.

Through the tangents in the park, and around the looping curves in the foothills, the five-car train raced in a spark-throwing projectile flight, with the engineer crouching motionless on his high seat, and the agile little fireman dancing back and forth on the footboard, hearing nothing but the roar of the exhaust, and seeing nothing but the sliding cataract of coal and the white-hot cavern he was skillfully filling against the fire-cutting grades of the cañon run just ahead.

As the miles fled to the rear, Darragh's nerve came slowly to its own; and with the return came the skilled engineer's joy of mastery over matter in motion. From time to time, as the familiar signals flitted past, he glanced at his watch. Slowly but surely he was eating a hole into the lost time.

At Timanyoni it was only a few seconds over thirteen minutes; at the cañon portal it had shrunk to less than twelve. And when the storming fifty-minute rush up the great gorge was ended, and the train was dodging the foothill curves in the race from the river gorge to Angels on the desert's edge, Darragh found that he had a little more than held his own; had, in point of fact, managed to win back a few more of the precious seconds.

At Angels, the order signal was out; but there was no delay. Train 17, the through westbound freight, was already on the siding; and, while the 1098's wheels were still grinding to the sudden stop under Carter's hand, Darragh was joining Jenkins at the operator's counter in the station.

"Crandall's clearing for you fellows as if you was taking the company doctors to a wreck," laughed the telegraph man, handing his order pad up for the signatures. "All straight to Last Chance, where you're to meet the Limited."

Darragh took his copy of the order, and held it up to the light to read it.

Postal special, Eng. 1098, Jenkins conductor, Darragh engineer, will run regardless to Navajo, twelve-one a. m., when it will take its place as Train Number 20 on new time card.

This was the wording of it; and Darragh crumpled it into his pocket and turned on his heel.

"Come on; let's go!" he barked at Jenkins; and two minutes later the race had been resumed, and the Angels distance signals were losing themselves in the rearward darkness.

One hour and fifty-five minutes was the time allowance for the special from Angels to the mid-desert station of Navajo, where it would take its new time-card rights as regular train Number 20; and Darragh, taking advantage of the long, level desert tangents, pushed the big ten-wheeler so successfully that his watch was ticking off the last half minute of the one hundred and fifteen when the lonely little cattle-loading station in the midst of the desolations came into sight.

Navajo, long since abandoned as a night telegraph station, showed no lights; but every detail of the surroundings, the single sidetrack, the red station building, with its iron roof contrasting with the weathered gray of the platforms, the whitewashed corral and loading chute, and, beyond the station, the huge bulk of the water tank—all these were struck out vividly in the brilliant beam of the headlight as Darragh shut off the steam and sent the air hissing into the brake cylinders to make the watering stop.

He was leaning out of the cab window and staring fixedly at something on the station platform when the train shot over the westward switch of the siding and Carter climbed over the coal to be ready to pull down the spout of the watering tank. Almost as soon as it took shape, the "something" evolved itself into the figure of a woman starting to her feet from her seat on a rude bench at the end of the building, and shading her eyes with her hand from the dazzling glare of the upcoming headlight.

For a single instant Darragh lost his head, and thought he was seeing a ghost—the ghost of Kitty Clare. Then he remembered Bridget Callahan's story of the hurry call and Kitty's flight on Number Six, and sanity came back. For some cause——

It was a thing that she did that made him stop trying to reason it out and catch his breath with an oath that was more an exclamation of horror than an imprecation. At the instant of the train's uprush, he saw her lower the shading hand, saw her eyes wide open and full of terror, staring, not at him, but at the front end of the 1098; saw her reel and stagger, and fall back upon the wooden bench, again covering her eyes as if to shut out a sight too dreadful to be borne.

Carter was up on the tender, waiting for Darragh to "spot" the manhole under the tank spout, when the Flying Postal stopped with a jerk. Having his own job to attend to, he did not notice that Darragh swung off to run quickly back to the platform of the deserted "day" station; nor did he hear Kitty Clare's glad little shriek when Darragh gathered her in his arms.

"What in the name o' common sense!" raged the lover; but she sobbed out the explanation at once.

"'Twas all a mistake, somehow, Jack, dear; and I've been scared stiff!" she wept. "Aunt Janey is dreadful sick, and Uncle Dan was to meet me with the buckboard. Something has happened, and he didn't come; and I've been here all alone since—since I got off of Number Six, and—and——"

"Alone? In the nighttime? Where is that blasted operator? I'll wring his neck if it's the last thing I ever lay hands on!" stormed Darragh.

"He doesn't know. He was gone when I got here. And I could do nothing but wait, and wait. And the coyotes howled and barked, and I saw things—horrible things! Oh, Jackie, dear, take me with you. Don't leave me here!"

"Sure I will, darling. 'Tis only the postal train, and no place for a woman. But you'll go on the engine with me—on over to Copah, where we can get a wire to your uncle. That'll be the way of it. Come, now, and we'll be fadin' away out o' this."

The tank spout was clanging to the perpendicular, when Darragh ran her forward to the engine and lifted her to the gangway. A scant half minute later

he had made her comfortable on his box, with a bunch of waste at her feet, to keep the hot boiler head from touching them, and the flight of the postal train was resumed, Darragh standing on the running step, with an arm at the girl's back to steady her against the swing and lurch of the high-hung flyer.

It was not until the Navajo stop had become only a backward, flitting memory that Darragh took the new time card from its clip and held it under the light of the gauge lamp. Train Number 20, taking time at 12:01, midnight, was ranked as a train of the first class having the right-of-road precedence even over the trains of its own class.

The first scheduled "meet"—and it was the only one with an opposing "first-class" train—was with the Limited at Last Chance; a lonely siding, which was at once the last passing track in the desert and the first in the edge of the Crosswater Hills. Darragh took his time and glanced at his watch. There were fifty-one miles to cover, and fifty-six minutes in which to cover them; and he gave the storming 1098 another notch or two of the throttle.

From the lunging start at Navajo, the girl had not spoken. Utterly weary, as it seemed, she had leaned her head against the cushioned box back and closed her eyes. Darragh did not try to make her talk. The cab clamor of a fast locomotive in full flight bars anything milder than a shout with lips to ear; and, besides, the young Irishman had all of the rough man's gentleness and compassion for the woman loved.

He was making the slow-down for the siding at Last Chance before she opened her eyes and started, awake.

"Where are we, Jack, dear?" she asked, in weak bewilderment.

"At Last Chance Siding. We meet the Limited."

She sat up and began to take notice.

"Are you making the time, Jack?"

"More than making it. We've got three full minutes of our own to t'row to the puppies," he laughed.

Carter had dropped off and gone ahead to set the inlet switch, and Darragh was flicking the air valve to keep the train in motion until he should get the "come ahead" from the fireman. When the switch light flipped from white to red, Darragh released the brakes, and the Flying Postal slid quietly into the sidetrack.

Carter reset the switch and came on leisurely. There was apparently plenty of time. As yet, there was neither sight nor sound of the coming Limited. Away up the line, where the siding dovetailed again into the main track through the outlet switch, a light twinkled and stared glassily, stared *red;* but neither Darragh nor the upcoming fireman saw it or suspected the trap that an absent-minded brakeman on a freight, passing Last Chance an hour earlier, had set for them.

None the less, the trap was there, as the red eye of the switch lamp sufficiently advertised; and malignant ingenuity could scarcely have devised a better one. The passing freight, in pulling out eastward, had left the switch open for the siding, and the approach to it, down the steep Crosswater grade, was around a sharp curve. Last Chance was not a stop for the Limited; and, barring quick work on somebody's part, the open switch promised a good chance for a head-on collision between the westward-rushing passenger and the standing postal train.

Kitty Clare was stirring again when Darragh set the air lightly to keep his train from drifting backward down the slight grade of the sidetrack.

"Was it all a bad dream, John?" she asked softly.

"What was a dream?"

"The things that I saw at Navajo—the awful things that kept coming out of the dark? And at the last—just under the Ten Ninety-eight's headlight—oh, I'm sure *that* must have been a dream!"

"What was it, Kitty, darling?"

"The—the dwarf; the Darragh dwarf. I saw it as plain as day, Jack. The old-fashioned Irish hat, the huddling cloak, and the long white beard! And the thought that came to me was that death was riding on your engine with you!"

"'Twas nothing but the scare of you, Kitty," said the big engineer; though, in his heart of hearts, the nameless fear was stirring again. "Forget it, little woman. In a couple of hours we'll be in Copah, and you'll be safe in bed at Mother Flanagan's."

As he spoke, the far-off song of the Limited's chime whistle rose on the still night air, followed by the low diapason of the steel humming to the myriad hammer blows of flying wheels.

"There she comes!" cried Carter, swinging himself up to the gangway of the ten-wheeler; and the saying was punctuated by a shrill scream from the young woman on Darragh's box.

When the two men looked in the direction of her pointing finger, they saw a sight to freeze the blood in any veins holding a single drop of the Celtic superstitions. On the forward end of the 1098's right-hand running board danced a frantic figure, with blazing eyes and a long, flowing beard, its apelike arms going like the sails of a windmill, and its thin lips loosing a series of bloodcurdling shrieks.

Carter was the first of the three in the cab to come alive to the threatened catastrophe.

"The switch!" he yelled. "He's pointin' at the switch—*it's turned wrong!*" and he flung himself out of the gangway to begin a hopeless race against the down-coming passenger, which was just then swerving around the curve of approach at full speed.

It was all over in a twinkling. Grimsby, engineer of the passenger train, saw the trap when he was fairly upon it, and did his best; and Darragh, who had come to his senses at Carter's yell, slammed the 1098 into the reverse motion, and spun its drivers in a fierce attempt to back away from the awful menace thundering down upon him. At the same instant, the misshapen figure disappeared from the running board, to reappear a moment later, dancing its fantastic breakdown fairly in front of the onrushing Limited.

The girl on Darragh's box cried out and hid her eyes; and, when she opened them again, she was alone in the cab, a pop valve was roaring deafeningly, the white, unblinking headlight eye of the passenger engine was staring blankly at the veiled eye of the 1098, both trains were at a stand, and a crowd of men was gathering at the track side a little way off.

Darragh came to her presently, and his story was short and to the point.

"'Twas old Pete Grogan," he said. "They've had him in the asylum these four years, and he broke loose and blew in here—with the wan idea in his crazy old head that he had to get square with me for a thing I didn't do, I guess." And then: "You'll be goin' back to Brewster in the sleeper of the Limited, and take a fresh start for your Uncle Dan's another day. I've fixed it with Shaughnessy to get you a berth in the Pullman. You'll go, like a good girl? After what's happened——"

She let him lift her from the high seat and help her to the ground—on the side away from the little crowd of curious investigators.

"And you'll go on and make your time, Jack? You'll not be needing me?" she asked anxiously.

"I was just a poor, crazy fool, Kitty, darlin'; and I'm that no more. I'm a man grown; and 'twas the thought that I was askin' you to marry wan less than that that was breakin' me heart, acushla." And, at the steps of the Pullman, he took her in his arms and kissed her good-by, saying: "Pray for the soul of a poor old man that's gone this night to whatever was waitin' for 'im, Kitty, girl. He'd suffered a cruel wrong in the days gone by, and he meant us no harm. Good night, darlin'; that's Carter pullin' the bell for me."

A RECORD WITH WARS AND WIRES

Robert C. Clowry, who is president of the Western Union Telegraph Company, went into the Civil War on the Union side when he was twenty-five years old, and displayed such gallantry that he was made a lieutenant colonel.

Fool for Luck

By Charles E. Van Loan

Author of "The Bachelor Benedict," "Jacob, Up to Date," Etc.

Did you ever feel like envying the man on the "free list"—the fellow who can pass out complimentary tickets to theaters, sparring matches, baseball games, and what not? Forget it! Read this!

MY name, though I do not suppose that it makes the slightest difference to any one, is Sowder—John Henry Sowder—and I am, in a way, connected with Publicity. What that connection is, I do not state, but it has something to do with the newspaper business.

Because of this connection with Publicity, I have had at my disposal—please note the past tense—complimentary tickets to performances of all sorts, ranging from lectures, concerts, and the drama to such sporting events as baseball and football matches, and sparring exhibitions. I say "have had at my disposal" because I shall never have any more complimentary seats to anything. Never, as long as I live.

I have requested that my name be stricken from the various free lists, and from now on I am, as regards the world of amusement, an ordinary citizen, who pays his way wherever he goes.

Personally, I do not regret this step, as Sunday is my day off, and there are no performances of any sort on Sunday, but I cannot say that it was for this reason that I canceled my free tickets for the future. It was because of a friend of a friend of mine—Clarence P. Moocher.

Moocher is responsible, and Moocher is the one who will suffer when he hears that there are to be no more free tickets. When I read the keen disappointment in his fat face, I shall rejoice that I have had the strength of character to sacrifice his happiness for the sake of my peace of mind.

Unless Moocher reads this story, he will never know why I have taken this step. It is unlikely that he will ever read it, for he peruses nothing but the pink sporting extras.

But I will go back to the beginning.

Clarence P. Moocher presented himself at my desk something like six months ago, bearing a letter of introduction from a good friend of mine. I believe the letter requested me to "show Moocher a good time." It also said that he was the best fellow in the world and that he "spoke the language of the tribe"—whatever that may mean. I never heard Moocher speak anything but garbled English.

After I had read the letter, I took a look at Clarence P. Moocher, and was prepossessed in his favor. He was young, large, fat, good-natured, and he wore diamonds.

Mr. Moocher insisted that I should dine with him as a preliminary to presenting him with the keys of the city. I agreed to the first part of the program, and, under the stimulus of rich food and drink, I made one of the great mistakes of my life. I gave him two tickets to a theatrical performance for the evening. He was delighted.

"Complimentaries, eh?" he said. "I never had a complimentary ticket in my life before!"

I said that it was nothing—less than nothing—and in a sudden excess of good feeling I stated to Moocher that,

because of my connection with Publicity, I often had such tickets and would be more than pleased to "take care of him" during his stay in the city. I believe I used the phrase, "extend the courtesies of the various places of amusement."

Moocher was overwhelmed. Had I known to what that rash presentation would lead, I think I might have choked him where he sat. But I did not know.

Before the week was out, Moocher called upon me again. This time I insisted that he should dine with me, and we dined very well—so well that I had to sign the check, not having the requisite amount of cash in my pockets.

Over the coffee, Moocher delicately hinted that he was very much interested in baseball, and expected to see the Saturday game. I was reckless enough to say that I would arrange it. How did I know that I was feeding warm blood to a tiger or setting a Frankenstein upon his feet? How was I to foresee that by the end of the month Moocher would be depending upon me—yes, absolutely *depending* upon me—to furnish him with free tickets to every attraction which came to town?

At the end of the second month, I had made of Clarence P. Moocher a regular customer. He no longer thanked me for the complimentary tickets which he secured through me. He had come to regard them as his by right. It was not that he was stingy, and did not like to spend his money, for he was very open-handed and often spent as much as four times the price of a free ticket upon lunch or dinner to which he invited me. It was simply because he had been bitten by the something-for-nothing microbe.

When Moocher was too busy to drop in at the office—and he soon reached this stage of familiarity—he would call me up by telephone and ask that "his ticket" be left at the hotel. From this, he progressed rapidly to the point where he addressed me in curt notes, something like the following, which is an exact copy of one of his communications:

OLD KID SOWDER: Have ticket left at box office in my name. Will call for it. Empire Theater. Yrs. C. P. M.

No "please," and no "thank you." Simply "have ticket left." This form of royal command jarred upon me. And I do not care to be addressed as "Old Kid Sowder."

I firmly believe that if Clarence P. Moocher should die to-night, he would present himself at the wicket of the pearly gates and address St. Peter condescendingly in this manner:

"My friend Sowder, of the *News*, has reserved an aisle seat here for me. S-o-w-d-e-r. You know him. Everybody knows him. On the *News*. Look for it in the 'M' box. Moocher is the name—Clarence P. Moocher."

And oh! what an awakening is coming to that young man when he learns that I have been wiped off the free list! What anguish when he learns that there will never be any more free tickets for him anywhere, secured by "his friend Sowder!"

When I awoke to the fact that I had made of Moocher an insolent pensioner upon my good nature, I began to scheme to rid myself of this Frankenstein—this ticket-snatching monster of my own creation. Once when he sent me a postal card demanding that I reserve a seat for him at a certain theater, I deliberately neglected to do so. I thought it might teach him a lesson. What folly to think that anything could teach Clarence P. Moocher a lesson!

I was very busy that evening, and I had left word that under no circumstances must I be disturbed. I had forgotten all about Moocher and the lesson which he was to receive.

At eight-thirty my telephone bell began to ring, and it continued to jangle with aggravating persistence. Very much annoyed, I jerked the receiver from the hook, and placed it against my ear. A complaining bellow greeted me.

"Hello! Hel-lo-o! Oh, is this you, Sowder? This is me—Moocher. Yes. I'm down here at the box office of the Globe Theater, and the clerk here says that there isn't any ticket reserved for me. Must be some mistake, old man.

Sorry to have to trouble you about it, but—say, here's the clerk now. Just tell him that it's all right, will you?"

And before I could get in a word edgewise, I found myself talking to the treasurer of the theater—who was not at all pleased at being called a clerk—and telling him that it *was* all right, that Mr. Moocher was an intimate friend of mine, and that any courtesy shown him, and so forth, and so forth, would be regarded in the light of a personal favor.

It may have been a weakness on my part, but I could not bring myself to humiliate the man openly, much as he deserved it. And what can be done with a person who refuses to take a hint?

It was shortly after this happening that Moocher called upon me and took me out to dinner. It was a very fine dinner indeed, and I began to see that something unusual was in the wind. The blow fell with the dessert—which is a good time for a blow to fall, if fall it must.

"There's going to be some racing out at the park," said Moocher, stabbing into the heart of a chocolate éclair. I know I shall never behold a chocolate éclair without being reminded of Clarence P. Moocher. He was passionately fond of sweets in every form—all fat men are—and chocolate éclairs were his pet dissipation. I have watched him eat as many as seven of them at one sitting.

"There is going to be some racing," said Moocher, pausing in order to give me a chance to proffer the usual service.

I did not say anything.

"How do you stand with the association?" asked Moocher pointedly.

I hastened to state that I did not stand at all, had never received any courtesies from the race-track people, and did not expect to receive any in the future.

"Pshaw!" said Moocher. "There must be a lot of complimentary race-track tickets floating around. The sporting editor, now—he ought to have a whole raft of 'em. I want to go out there next week and win a barrel of money, and I'd hate to have to cough up two big iron men every day."

An idea of great brilliancy flashed into my head. I do not know how I happened to think of it. It was probably suggested by the remark about betting.

"Do you—bet a great deal?" I asked.

"Any time I know something," boasted Moocher, "I'm there with bells. I'll bet 'em as high as a hound's back!"

I had no means of knowing how high that might be, but Moocher's air led me to believe that the altitude of his wagers was great. His answer pleased me, for it fitted in with the half-formed plan for plucking this Frankenstein and teaching him a lesson.

"I'll ask the sporting editor," I said. "He is a friend of mine, and I think it will be all right."

"Then, I'll count on it," said Moocher, harpooning another chocolate éclair. "I think they issue a badge or something which is good for the entire meeting. Tell him to get one of those if he can. If he can't make the riffle, daily admissions will answer."

I said that I would try for a badge.

"And, by the way, Sowder," he continued, "I'd like to meet the fellow who reports the racing for the paper. Chances are that he'll have a lot of inside information, and, if he knows that I'm a friend of yours, he might put me onto a good thing."

I could have shouted for joy. The fellow was actually setting my trap himself. If what follows shocks the sensitive reader, I ask him to remember that I am a sensitive man myself and that this Moocher had driven me to the utmost limit of a nature which is, to say the least, kindly and accommodating. I was a free horse, as the saying is, and I was being ridden to death—ridden to death by a fat man with spurs. Let this be remembered in my defense.

That night I had a chat with the sporting editor and his assistant, Sammy Strong. Sammy was the paper's race-track expert—a wiry, sharp-nosed little man with a most phenomenal vocabulary.

I explained myself at length; I gave

my reasons, and placed great stress upon the provocation. Sammy Strong listened, cigarette in mouth.

"I get you," he said, at last. "This bird has been macing you to death for broads, and you want him tore off. What?"

I was a trifle puzzled, but I said that I wished to give Mr. Moocher a lesson that would make him avoid me as he would avoid a pestilence. Sammy made a speaking gesture with his right hand, impossible to describe.

"You want me to give him a bum steer," said he. "You want me to tout him to set in the bank roll on a chunk of cheese. I'm on. Leave it to me. Bring this free-ticket fiend up here, and introduce him. I'll slip him some subcellar information that'll set him awa-a-y out yonder at the end of the bread line. I'll have him walkin' home from the track, if you say so."

"Sammy will fix this friend of yours," said the sporting editor. "The tips Sammy gives me are bad enough. I shudder to think what he might do if he was really in earnest about picking a loser."

In time Moocher appeared at the office, and the sporting editor presented him with a bit of cardboard on a ribbon, which would make him free of the grand stand, the betting ring, and the paddock for the life of the meeting.

Moocher was very much pleased. He invited the sporting editor and his entire staff out to dinner. I was not included, for some reason or other. Sammy Strong accepted for the sporting department, and returned at ten o'clock, slightly illuminated, and saying that it was a shame to do it.

The race meeting opened on a legal holiday. Though I had no previous intention of doing anything of the sort, I secured a day off, and went out to watch the "tearing-off" process.

Briefly stated, here was the plan of campaign:

Moocher, who had been cultivating Sammy Strong extensively, was moved by selfish considerations. He believed that the little expert could tell him how to win a great deal of money. Strong, who had taken a powerful dislike to Moocher, was pledged to me to select the very worst horse at the track and persuade Moocher to back the animal heavily. By this means, I was determined that at least one of Moocher's free tickets should cost him something, and it was because I desired to be in at the death that I found myself inside the fence at the park.

Feeling in need of nourishment, I entered the restaurant under the grand stand and ordered a chicken sandwich and a glass of milk. A heavy hand fell upon my shoulder with a resounding slap, and, choking over a morsel of chicken, I looked up. There was Moocher, beaming down upon me with the utmost good will.

"Why, you old stick-in-the-mud!" he cried, "I didn't know you had any sporting blood in you!"

I mumbled something about the sport of kings.

"Yes, and queens, too, judging by the looks of some of 'em up there in the boxes," said Moocher loudly. "By the way, d'you know that this badge doesn't call for a box seat? How can I have that fixed?"

I said that he would have to see Sammy Strong about that, and my heart hardened. I felt it. The man was absolutely impossible. There seemed to be no limit to his selfishness and his assurance. A box seat indeed!

"Speak of the devil!" said Moocher. "Here's Strong now."

Sammy entered, and hung his binoculars over the back of a chair.

"Well, what d'you know?" asked Moocher. "What's your three-star, extra-special good thing to-day? Want to get away winner on the first day, you know, for luck."

"Oh, you'll get away winner, all right, all right," said Sammy. Then he lowered his voice, first glancing all around to make sure that he was not overheard.

"Keep your money in your pocket until the fifth race," said he, in a half whisper. "Something is going to be pulled off in that race, and you and me

and the owner are going to be the only ones in on it."

"No!" ejaculated Moocher, licking his lips. "A long shot?"

"The longest shot you ever saw in your life!" said Sammy. "No, don't ask me any more, because I can't tell you. You might crack it to somebody and spoil the price."

"But"—and here Moocher waggled his thumb in my direction—"Sowder ought to be in on it, too."

"Oh, yes!" said Sammy. "Sowder—well, he's in already!"

Moocher pleaded for the name of the horse. He said he would not tell a soul. Sammy was firm.

"Just one whisper would be enough to spoil the price," said the expert. "I'm afraid the odds won't be any too long as it is. These bookmakers are going to be awful tight this meeting.

"Now," concluded Sammy, "you meet me here in the restaurant as soon as the fourth race is over. Then, I'll give you the name of the horse and tell you how to place your money. How much are you going to bet?"

Moocher pulled out a corpulent wallet, and ran his thumb nail over the edges of the bank notes.

"I'll bet 'em till they holler for help!" he said. "Any time I know something—look out!"

"Oh, you'll *know* something, all right!" said Strong. "See you here after the fourth race!"

I managed to escape from Moocher, and killed time until the end of the fourth race. Once during the afternoon, I saw Sammy Strong. He was buzzing about the betting ring like a bumblebee, but he stopped to laugh when he saw me.

"Is he game to bet the bundle?" Sammy asked me. "Because I'm going to spring a bogus owner on him and make it awful strong. He's going to bet on an old mare that hasn't been in the money for two seasons. Fellow that owns her just runs her to have the fun of coolin' her out afterward. She won't be one, two, seven!"

"Are you sure?" I asked him.

"Sure!" scoffed Sammy. "Every horse in the race will beat her! She'll be so far behind when the others finish that it'll look as if she was starting in the sixth race!"

I was waiting with the victim when Sammy Strong and a stranger entered the restaurant. Sammy, with a great show of secrecy, conducted us over into a far corner, and introduced his friend—a tall, red-whiskered man, who was chewing a straw. He wore a purple stock, pinned with an immense rhinestone horseshoe, and he looked a true son of the turf. And he not only looked it, but he smelled it. The evidence, so far as I was in a position to judge, was complete.

"Mr. Moocher," said Sammy, in a hoarse whisper, "meet Mr. Randolph T. Jones. Mr. Jones owns the horse I was telling you about—runs her in the name of the Eastern Shore Stables."

Moocher immediately produced his program.

"Eastern Shore," he repeated. "Then it's Molly O."

"Yes," said Sammy, with a wink at the whiskered stranger. "It's Molly O. Tell Mr. Moocher what you just told me, Jones."

Mr. Jones began, much as if he were reciting a lesson.

"This old mare," he said, "is certainly readied up to win to-day. I've been savin' her up for it and losin' with her whenever the price wasn't right. We'll get all the bettin' we want to-day at good odds, and the old girl is going to go for the coonskins."

"And nobody knows——" prompted Sammy Strong.

"Nobody knows," repeated the horsy Jones, "a thing about her. They all think she's a bad mare. That's what we want 'em to think. Here's one place where you can bet 'em with perfect confidence as long as they'll take the money."

He stopped, having run down a second time.

"And you are going to bet——" said Strong.

"I am going to bet the bank roll," said the "horseman."

"She has been working good," said Sammy, the prompter.

"She has been working like a ghost," said Jones. "She has the speed of the field, breaks well, and is a game finisher."

Full stop.

Moocher rose to his feet, and put his hand in his inside pocket.

"Better take the opening betting," said Sammy, "and go right down the line on her."

"I'll begin at the other end of the ring," said Jones, and he, too, hurried away.

I followed Moocher, some distance in the rear. I do not know a great deal about horse racing, and I have never been able to figure out the system of mathematics used by bookmakers, so the only thing I know is that the figure set against Molly O was the highest one on the board. When I first saw it, it was twenty, but before Moocher had gone very far it receded to fifteen and then to twelve and ten. I have every reason to believe that he kept on betting as long as his money lasted. When he came out of the ring, he was perspiring freely, and he had a handful of pasteboards, which he said represented a great deal of money.

"Wonder where Jones is," he said. "I didn't see him in the ring."

I did not see him, either. For the matter of that, I have never set eyes on him again.

"Come on up in the press box," said Strong, winking at me. "You can get a good look at the finish from there."

Moocher, of course, accompanied us, seizing a chair as soon as he got into the box. A young man protested.

"You've got my seat!" said he.

"Have I?" asked Moocher, unmoved. "I guess you'll have to get another one. I'm with Sowder, and it's all right."

And there he sat, while the young man fumed and talked under his breath about Buttinskis and people with nerve enough to frost you.

Somewhere a bugle sounded, and horses appeared on the track—nine of them. So far as I could tell by looking at them, they were very evenly matched, but then, I know nothing about race horses.

"There's my baby!" bawled Moocher, jumping to his feet and upsetting two of the reporters, who cursed him fervently. "There's my baby! Oh, you Molly O!"

The other reporters looked at Moocher pityingly, and one of them said to Strong:

"Who let that bug in here? Molly O! Where does he get that noise?"

Sammy said something in an undertone, and the other reporter grinned and looked at me. I felt very uncomfortable.

"There she goes!" cried Moocher, seizing me by the arm. "That's her! The black one! I guess she looks rotten, eh, Sowder?"

He should not have appealed to me by name, but I was glad to have the horse identified. I suppose it is proper to refer to a mare as "she." At any rate, I shall do so for the purposes of this narrative. Molly O had nothing to distinguish her from the rest of the horses, save her color and the color of the silk jacket worn by the little boy who sat on her back. I shall never forget that jacket. It was a vivid canary yellow. I am sure I should not have known, by looking at her, that she was such a poor specimen of a race horse. To my inexperienced eye, she bore no distinguishing marks of inferiority.

The horses continued around the track for some distance, where they halted. Moocher was very much excited. He could not stand still, and he chattered incessantly, often calling me by name.

"Now, then, you crooked-legged little rascal," he said, "get up there to the barrier with that Molly O!" He was addressing the rider, whom I was quite sure he had never seen before. "Get that mare up there! What's the matter with you? Trying to get my horse left at the post?"

Then, after a short breathing space, he directed his attention to the official in charge of the start.

"What's the matter with that starter?" he complained. "Is he blind or

just drunk? Molly O was ready then, and he never said a word! Get her up again, boy! That's right! Now! *Now! NOW!* Aw—rats!"

Then something happened, a grunt of universal satisfaction ran through the stand, the dots of color shot forward in an even line, and Moocher hammered me on the back until my glasses fell to the floor.

"They're off!" he cried.

"So are my glasses!" I retorted. But he did not hear me. He was yelling to the rider on Molly O, who could not under any circumstances have heard his voice.

I cannot describe in any technical sense the running of that race. All I know is that Moocher jumped up and down in the press box, and bellowed like a bull, and the little dots of color skimmed along the fence in the distance, rounded a turn, and started in our direction.

Then I began to look for Molly O. Several of the colors were jumbled together.

Then I heard Moocher. Everybody in the grand stand must have heard him at the same time.

"That's the boy!" he yelled. "That's the way to ride a race! Take her away to the outside, and *come on with her!*"

As he yelled, I located the spot of canary yellow. It detached itself from the kaleidoscope, and swung well out toward the middle of the track, and there it hung alone.

"That old mare always runs out on the turn," said a voice behind me, so that what Moocher evidently regarded as horsemanship may have been habit. From the tone of voice in which the comment was made, I did not believe it was meant as a compliment to Molly O.

"Come on, you black beetle!" howled Moocher, and for the first time his tone was heavy with doubt.

I looked at the other horses. They seemed to be well ahead of Molly O, and the colors were grouped on the rail, in very close quarters, so it seemed to me.

Sammy Strong was looking through his glasses. I heard his voice, lifted in a shrill yell:

"Those two in front are bumping each other every jump! There'll be a nasty spill there if they're not careful! Open up! *Open up!*"

Even as he cried the impotent warning, it happened. I was looking straight at the shifting mass of color, but I shall never be certain how it came about.

I recall a sudden cloud of dust, blotting out horses and colors, then a sickening glimpse of animals struggling upon the ground. Dimly I saw the horses which were behind the first group rear upon their haunches in an attempt to save themselves from plunging into the wreck. I saw a red jacket crawling under the fence, to collapse in the ditch. A blue jacket ran a few steps, and dropped in the middle of the track.

The suddenness of the catastrophe appalled me, and struck the crowd dumb with apprehension. Against that shivering background there rose a profane bellow. It was Clarence P. Moocher's voice.

"She wins alone! Molly O wins *alone!* Take your time, boy; *take your time!* It's all over! All—over! Why, she could turn around and *back* in!"

"Shut up!" shouted a hundred voices.

Some one behind us hurled a seat cushion, and it carried away Moocher's hat. I remember being thankful for that. But Moocher did not so much as turn his head, for there, in the middle of the track, all alone as he had said, came the black mare and the canary-yellow jacket. Far in the background four horses were galloping heavily. One of them was riderless.

Moocher continued to yell advice until Molly O cantered past the judges' stand. Then he paid his respects to every one within the sound of his voice, and flourished a handful of pasteboards.

I jogged Sammy Strong's elbow. His glasses were leveled at the scene of the accident. The crowd was already pouring up the track. Three of the riders were being carried away.

"Sammy!" I said.

He snarled.

"He won't win on that sort of a thing, will he?" I asked. "It doesn't seem *fair*, you know. It was an accident."

"Who'll win?" demanded Strong, whirling.

"Why, Moocher," I said.

"Good Lord!" groaned Sammy. "Did that old mare finish first? Yes, there's her number! Well! Well! What d'you think of that? I never even saw her! I had twenty bucks on that favorite up there—and he broke his leg to beat me!"

And he swore into his binoculars as he adjusted them.

"But will they pay when there's an accident like this?" I persisted. "Does he win all that money?"

"Does he win!" snapped Sammy Strong. "I should say he *does* win! All the good horses in the race fell down! Why wouldn't he win? That big stiff is so lucky he could fall into a sewer and come out with a diamond necklace wrapped around his ankle! I've got to go down and see how bad those kids are hurt!"

And then Clarence P. Moocher, the favorite of the gods, fell upon me with a hoarse outcry and the weight of a steam pile driver.

"Well, old kid!" he shouted, banging me upon the back until I coughed, "she would have won, anyhow! Come on down and watch me make these bookmakers say 'Sir!' "

I did not accept that invitation, but I did see him afterward. He was jamming a great roll of bills into his trousers pockets.

"Been looking everywhere for Jones!" he cried cheerily. "I wonder how much he won?"

I could say, very truthfully, that I did not know.

"Oh, say, before I forget it," said my Frankenstein, "I wish you would get me some seats for the minstrel show to-night. Get two, because I want to take Jones if I can find him!"

It was at that precise moment that I made the stern resolution to divorce the name of John Henry Sowder from the free list for life.

I have not seen Clarence P. Moocher since that afternoon, but I have received two letters from him. He has been out of town, and returns to-morrow. His last letter asks me to get him a box for the Globe Theater on Monday night.

I do not know how I shall break it to him. I do not know that I care. I feel that I have contributed quite enough to his fortune as it is.

I do not regret the step which I have taken, for, as I said before, Sunday is my day off.



A LITTLE BIT OF HISTORY

ONE afternoon, when Andrew Carnegie stopped in Charlottesville, Virginia, for a few hours, the steel magnate hired a carriage, and, remembering that the town had been the home of Thomas Jefferson, gave the old negro driver this order:

"Show me the most interesting places in the neighborhood, especially places connected with the name of Jefferson."

The driver whipped up his emaciated horse, and made his way, slowly and in silence, to the top of the hill on which Monticello, the old home of Jefferson, stands.

"Thar's Monticello," he said, turning his head only halfway toward Mr. Carnegie. "It wuz own' by Thomas Jufferson. Jufferson stahted this hyuh school in Charlottesville, an' wuz always in debt—so I'm tole."

And, without further exploration or observation, he drove the millionaire back to the railroad station.

The second part of a great adventure serial. It began in the November Month-end POPULAR, published two weeks ago.

The Big Fish

By H. B. Marriott Watson

Author of "The Skirts of Happy Chance," "The Devil's Pulpit," Etc.

SYNOPSIS OF OPENING CHAPTERS

Two small lacquered boxes are sold at auction. The first is secured after spirited bidding by two men, later known as Werner and Maddock. They leave the auction room not knowing of the other box. Jack Poindexter, a young Englishman with surplus money and time, has watched the bidding on the first box, and through curiosity, bids in the second. The others return as he secures it and offer him any sum for it. He refuses to part with the box and takes it home. That night his apartment is entered, the box evidently the object, but the burglar is frightened off without securing it. The following day, Poindexter meets his friend, Dick Cassilis, an American, also possessed of abundant means and leisure, and takes him down to the former's bungalow in the country. The burglar makes a second attempt and is caught by the young men. To obtain his freedom, Houston, the burglar, tells them the secret of the box. It had belonged, so he says, to his partner, Raymond. He shows them a secret compartment containing the key to the location of the Big Fish, the enormous treasure horde buried many years before by the Incas of Peru. The three decide to go at once in search of the treasure. Trailing over the Andes they find themselves followed by an agent of Werner, a little cockney called Coop. Houston warns him off and finally shoots him. The man drags himself to his tent to die. Poindexter and Cassilis bear it as long as they can and then go to Coop's tent to offer him aid, but he has disappeared. They suspect that Houston has made away with him and return conscience stricken to their camp.

CHAPTER VI.

THE RECOVERY.

YES, Cassilis was right. We never broached the subject to Houston. We crept back as we had stolen forth, like thieves in the night, afraid, furtive, with a strange, new scheme of perverted feelings. The law of the wild was growing up about us, and molding us. I saw it in the naked crags, in the desolate *puna,* in the everlasting snow fields.

Houston was the only one of the three who made any pretense of cheerfulness, and I could not but see that it was an effort on his part. He left us pretty much to ourselves, but when he did mix in our company he was comparatively loquacious. I have said he talked well, and he had a store of experience from which to draw. I sometimes wondered how rich the store might be, and how much he dare bring into the light.

Cassilis had grown silent, even surly. I could not recognize in him the bright, resilient, confident nature which had always attracted me. He seemed fallen flat, as if under weights, and to make no response to external things. By this time we were both acclimatized to the mountain sickness, but I wondered if there were an aftermath—what the doctors call sequelæ, as in the case of influenza. I did not like the idea of Cassilis moody, brooding..

He broke it to me on the second day. Houston, freed of his incubus, had set his compass for the goal of our hopes. We had gathered that we were within a week's camp of Astarnok. The word rang on his lips as it were from a clarion. Cassilis stirred, cleaned out his pipe, and watched the back of the man as he went from us, clean, upstanding, lithe, a handsome, sinister being.

"Jack, do you remember that night?" Cassilis was speaker.

I pondered. I knew in a minute. But—— "What night?" I asked peevishly. It was only three days old, but it seemed to be buried history. The savage peak of the Cordillera across the

gorge was like some agony in the Inferno of Dante. I saw damned human souls climbing it and falling.

"Jack," said Cassilis, in a lower voice, losing somehow the whole of that distance which had lately come between us. "Jack, we'll never reach the place, and we shall find nothing."

"Why the devil shouldn't we?" I asked impatiently.

Cassilis was looking down into the black gorge, with a musing eye. "Don't you think Coop'll do it?" he asked.

I stirred uneasily. What had flashed through a weakened brain in the dead watches of the night, when it seemed hard to breathe the thin air?

"Superstitious?" I shot at him.

He lit his pipe slowly. "No; it's conviction. You've got it. Coop will do for us in death what he failed in life." He shuddered. "I feel Coop all about."

"Look here, Dick," I said firmly. "Drop all that. It's bad enough to face the facts and the circumstances, let alone inventing and imagining."

He made no answer to this, but presently he knocked out his pipe and laughed. "I'd like to see Houston's face when Coop does him out of it," he said.

Of course he was abnormal. I can see that now. But at the time it did not seem so odd. He had got home when he had suggested that I myself had been obsessed by certain feelings. Coop was becoming a burden to both of us—not, I mean, a burden of conscience, for we had come to accept the law of the wild, but rather a burden of vengeance. I think we both hated Coop. I know I did. But something was pursuing us, and we both dimly recognized what it was. In death the cockney was as vulgar as in life, but he was more formidable. He rode the air.

Houston was never affected as far as we could see. On the contrary, his cheerfulness appeared to increase, and when he announced that we were only four days by his reckoning off Astarnok, his excitement manifested itself. It was not wholly a healthy manifestation. He grew jerky of manner, fell into silences, and came out of them jubilant, all but chuckling. I did not fancy the man in that condition, little as I had fancied him before. I thought this must be the particular way in which the abominable influence of those altitudes and solitudes took him.

On the afternoon of that day, I was walking in Houston's company over a rough piece of ground, with the mules in the rear, when of a sudden I heard a low exclamation from him, and his face staring up at the bluff opposite underwent a deadly change. I followed his gaze, and saw two figures on the sky line of the spur. Houston lifted his rifle with a cry like a wounded animal.

"Stop it, you fool!" I shouted, knocking the barrel up.

The report rang and echoed among the rocks. I swung my service glasses round, and directed them across the gully.

"It's a woman, you idiot!" I shouted.

Houston stood, quivering, and his face slowly melted back into its fluent, mobile condition. "I'm sorry," he said. "I thought it was—I wonder what a woman's doing here."

We should soon know, for the trail they were following was converging toward ours. As I looked, I saw another figure, which also seemed short-skirted, and then the nodding heads of mules. We moved on without a sign, toward the point of convergence, but when some three hundred yards still separated us, I climbed up the slope toward the now obvious female figures. They were both clad suitably for those heights, and each wore blue glasses, which prevented any proper view of their faces. I will confess to a sudden live interest in them, which served to make me realize how deeply, how astonishingly, we were cut off from all that constituted civilization.

"This is a queer place to meet in," I remember I began, hat in hand, and I saw the woman who was in front turn her head aside, put out her hand, and rest it on a big bowlder near. The other stepped forward, as if to cover the significance of this movement, whatever it might be, and said in English:

"I'm right glad. We were getting pretty lonely. It preys on your nerves, doesn't it?"

I answered her as one would answer a new acquaintance, and we spoke in a friendly way. I was conscious that the other woman had moved away past the bowlder, and was giving instructions to the muleteers in the rear. Then she joined her companion.

"How many are you?" she asked, speaking for the first time, in a clear and rather low voice.

I told her we were three in number, and added that we were prospectors. Under this style, we had agreed from the first to hide our quest. "My name's Poindexter," I added.

Probably she took it as a challenge, at any rate as an invitation. "Mine is Varley," she said slowly, "and this is Mrs. Chester."

"You're wondering," said Mrs. Chester, with a laugh, "what brings two unattached women out into this. I've been wondering that a lot myself, and I have come to a conclusion which satisfies me, but not Miss Varley. Do you happen to have any olives?"

I laughed. "Yes, I believe we have," I said.

"Stuffed?" she inquired whimsically.

"Stuffed, I think. My friend Cassilis refuses to travel without them." I indicated Cassilis, who was now quite close.

He lifted his hat. Miss Varley regarded him fixedly through her blue spectacles.

"But we are stopping you," I said. "Let us go down, and we'll find the olives, unless Cassilis has eaten them all. I assume we'll make a common camp to-night."

"Of course," said Mrs. Chester. "Do you know I was mighty glad when I saw you. What were you shooting at?"

"Oh—a—a condor," I said lamely.

"I hate those creatures." She shuddered. "I can't get accustomed to them. Miss Varley's a good shot; I'm not. The thing kicks so hard."

She leaned on my arm as we descended through the rough stones, and I don't know that she was even aware that she had done so. She rambled on like a child. I began to like Mrs. Chester, and to wish I could see her face properly. All her features were elusive behind those disfiguring glasses. The two "outfits" commingled, but I could not see Houston. He was somewhere ahead.

"We have always had Manuel to choose our camps for us," said Mrs. Chester.

Houston was shouting in the distance, and as he came back he encountered two of our Indians. Then he marched up, a smile on his burned face.

"This is your—this is your other companion?" inquired Mrs. Chester.

I made the introductions. "Mrs. Chester—Miss Varley—this is Mr. Houston."

There was a moment of absolute stillness on the part of both women. I was conscious of that, though Houston was making a conventional response. Then quite suddenly, Miss Varley took off her glasses, and stared at him. I have told you that I have a habit of noticing niceties; her eyes were full, wide, and inquiring, as if regarding a specimen under a glass with awakened interest. Mrs. Chester was talking with Cassilis, exchanging, I think, experiences of the *soroche*. Houston, who had a good deal of manner with women, as he had shown on board, was offering his most engaging social properties. I watched Miss Varley.

Her face was somewhat pallid, and finely molded, with rather a broad brow and bold features. Her hair and eyebrows were dark, but her eyes were gray beneath, and very steady and quiet. What struck me most was the latent power of her whole poise. She gave one the impression of reserves. Her body moved easily and with just grace upon its hinges, so to speak. She swept her gaze on me, and there was something from which I winced.

I had never seen a more beautiful woman. That was my impression; and yet, when I took her to pieces afterward, I wondered why. I had seen faces grow more vivid, with more regularly handsome features; I had seen

greater animation, which so often goes to save an otherwise commonplace appearance; I had seen more color, style, and charm in faces. But I had never seen one more striking, never one which made a pull upon me so deeply with that personal magnetism which is, or may be, individuality, and which is certainly beauty.

Mrs. Chester called to her, and her face suddenly broke into a smile. That was the last and completing effect. I almost thought I had been waiting for that. At any rate, it achieved the final triumph. The radiance of that smile flashed a charm even upon those barren hills.

"Now, you will be able to dine for the first time, Freda," she said, as if indulgently to a younger child.

But Mrs. Chester also had stripped off her glasses, and I saw her for what she was, a pretty, vivacious, round-faced blonde of thirty, who was engrossing Cassilis' eyes.

"We're botanizing," said Miss Varley to Houston. "I hear you're prospecting."

"I'm not botanizing," interjected Mrs. Chester, who had heard this. "I'm merely the commissariat. Miss Varley is the scientific head of the expedition."

"The word is pretentious," suggested Miss Varley, a faint smile playing on her face.

"I don't think so. Do you, Mr. Cassilis?" said Mrs. Chester, seating herself on a rock, prepared to argue the point. "We've come all the way from New York to explore, and lost a precious season in consequence."

"You like seasons?" asked Cassilis, who hated them, or at least had avoided them for ten years or more.

She was hesitating, playing him like a finished coquette, I judged, but Miss Varley seemed to think a deeper explanation was required.

"As a matter of fact, the expedition, as Mrs. Chester insists, was equipped by Vassar. You see, this region is one of the few not fully investigated. We considered it a reproach to the United States that it should remain so."

She was looking at me with that curiously disconcerting regard of hers.

"I agree," I said, "but it seems a reproach also to men that it is left for women to——"

"Yes," she nodded, smiling. "That is one of my points. That touches me nearly."

"Mercedes is a suffragist," broke in Mrs. Chester, overhearing. "She is an ardent feminist. I can't soar after her all the way. Even although I've been married——"

"I was in hopes," said Cassilis softly, "that it might have been because of that."

She shot a glance at him. "Yes," she said, with a change of voice and manner. "Yes," very quietly. "Perhaps it was because of that."

Though my mind mechanically registered this talk, I was thinking of nothing just then but of a name—Mercedes. It repeated itself in my head, and seemed in a way to flower in that rocky cañon.

Miss Varley turned graciously to Houston, as if to an acknowledged leader.

"I see my men have already settled on the camp. As you have kindly supplied us with olives, perhaps you will also add your company."

Houston's courtesy was almost executed with a flourish. It had just that amount of overelaboration which settled his social genesis. But it was easy, and apparently natural. Was this the man who a few days' earlier—— We somehow seemed to have "civilized" with this encounter of the sexes. Mrs. Chester was speaking apart with Miss Varley, who listened and shook her head. They both moved across the gully toward the tents which the Indians had already pitched.

"Pretty women both," said Houston, with a connoisseur's air. "Why they will try to spoil their beauty at games like these is a puzzle for gods."

"The beauty," said Cassilis, "is still to spoil. Where are my dress clothes, Jack?"

Houston laughed; we were all human

again. "I think I'll take a taxi——" he said in his turn.

Our dinner party was a success; it could not have failed in the circumstances. The ladies had produced from their stores the most tasteful dishes which modern commerce and modern science could pack and procure, and something had been added from our larder. The subjects of our different quests opened up naturally. Houston pressed the question of our companions' destination.

"Ultimately the *Montaña,*" said Miss Varley, letting her gaze descend the wild scenery, "but," she added, "there are many points of interest in these upper regions."

"You propose taking the Fuego Pass?" suggested Houston.

"Yes." She turned to him. "That was what we set out to do, but we may possibly change our plans, get deflected for a time. Anyway, we go north for some days."

"How charming for us!" said Cassilis. "We go north also."

Houston said nothing.

"That will be delightful for us," said Miss Varley, after ever so slight a pause. "We shall feel almost within call of Central Park, shan't we, Freda?"

At that word, Mrs. Chester flashed vivaciously into the talk with a chatter of New York. She vowed she was homesick, and Cassilis followed suit. I engaged Miss Varley in conversation, but I had the feeling of some one climbing a fence. She was quite, oh, wonderfully and beautifully civil, but she seemed to have entrenched herself in those reserves of which I have spoken. She picked her way in a talk with both Houston and myself very coolly and in friendly discourse, but I contrasted her with her companion much to her disadvantage. This younger woman was of too austere and cold a nature. She was too much of a piece with those highlands of the Sierra. I felt chilled and unsatisfied. Surely beauty was not designed to be thus frigidly exhibited.

Cassilis and Mrs. Chester had run to earth some friends in common in New York, and were talking quite excitedly.

"Molly married, you know. Didn't you hear?"

"No-o; that must have been when I was in Siberia. I don't think I had any letters for many months, and when I did get them I must have missed that."

"But you've been in New York since," protested Mrs. Chester.

"I was there last May, wasn't it? But I was only galloping through. I saw few people."

"Ah, you are one of those Americans who regard your country as a prison to escape from."

She spoke reproachfully. Cassilis shook his head. "No; I regard it rather as a home to return to when one is sick of the wilderness—this, for example." He waved his hand at savage nature.

"Europe isn't like this," objected Mrs. Chester.

"Much worse," he said seriously, "the wilderness there is moral."

Miss Varley, who had lent an ear to this, was eying him with interest.

"You think Europe is ethically worse than America?" she asked.

"Not a doubt of it," said Cassilis airily. "Poindexter happens to be English, but he is painfully conscious of the moral decadence of his nation. He came here to get away from it."

Miss Varley's gaze rested on my face a moment, though she must have known that he was talking nonsense.

"They say that a course of Nature has a beneficial and recuperative effect," she said.

I did not wish to remember at that moment, but her words somehow brought back the horrid pictures. Beneficial! Cassilis and I could have told her better. It bred madness; it made devils; it destroyed the common bonds of humanity in which we were knit together.

So the evening, which had opened with pleasant excitement for me, was closed in vexation. Nor was this latter feeling limited to that one hour; it recurred. Somehow I was at a disadvantage with Miss Varley. Though I was drawn by her personality more

than I cared to realize, I was internally discomfortable in her presence. She seemed a sort of incarnate conscience, reminding me, with her fresh, deliberate eyes, how far I had fallen from high standards. For the next two days, I had ample time to develop these mixed feelings, for our parties made common progress northward.

It was on the third day that I began to perceive Houston was getting restive. We had now, according to his earlier statements, reached a point from which Astarnok, our goal, was readily accessible. To my calculations, it appeared that the place was but two days distant. Houston was a man, as far as I had judged or could judge, amenable to female influence, and he undoubtedly extracted pleasure from the society of the other sex. I might, indeed, have suspected him of a susceptibility to women if I had gone only by his superficial actions. Yet it was evident that he was embarrassed now by the presence of these two women.

At the end of the second day toward evening, we descended into a valley, which presented more aspects of life than we had hitherto encountered. There were trees in it under the shelter of bluffs and headlands, and wild shrubs and bushes grew fairly thickly. I suppose that we had gradually left the distressing elevations of the Cordillera, and were now upon more moderate heights of the Sierra. In this comparatively blooming and flowering valley, diversified with trees and the signs of animal life, we pitched the camps.

I remember that there was a flower, a white flower, growing in the valley, and I drew Miss Varley's attention to it. We had gone out together as the sun fell, and there was a beautiful panorama stretched before us. We looked eastward, but the sun was going down behind western bowlders. I hate snow, which is a violation of the laws of vision; yet the capped peaks glistened wonderfully in the glow, and the jagged precipices, now seeming remote and out of our lives, looked no longer malignant, but of a great, grave dignity. We stood in silence for some time, for she had ignored, or not noticed, my reference to the flower, and then she spoke almost abruptly.

"You are an Englishman, Mr. Poindexter, and were once in the diplomatic service."

I was a little astonished. "Yes," I assented, "but no good. I've always been more or less of a failure, as things are counted," I added, feeling a strong impulse to honest confession before her.

"What do you mean by that?" she asked, looking at me gravely.

"Your people know the difference," I explained in a rather shamefaced way. "They do things. I never have. I've drifted. I'm a dilettante, an amateur in life."

"And Mr. Cassilis?" she inquired.

"Oh, in a way he does count," I said. "He is intent on solving the riddle of perpetual motion. He has the epitome of the known world."

"You have known him a long time?" she asked.

"I forget how many years it is since Dick Cassilis and I met in Vienna. We are old comrades."

"Mr. Houston?" she suggested.

"Houston? Well, oh, he happens to be associated with us in this venture—that is all," I said, feeling uncomfortable.

She was silent for a moment, and was looking at the glow on the mountain. I recovered my courage.

"Do you know where that leads?" I asked. "It's the Fuego Pass, Houston says, and beyond is the *Montaña* with its vast forests. Strange, isn't it, that the mountains should divide such contrasts? One is so used also to looking upon the East as the barrens that the world here seems upside down. A little higher, and you might see, or fancy you saw, the sea, beating on the Peruvian shores. 'By the long wash of Australasian seas.' There is something more impressive in the Pacific than in the Atlantic. Perhaps it is its loneliness. There's nothing yonder for so many, many thousand miles. One wonders what Pizarro thought when there

burst upon him this ocean as he crossed the great range."

She glanced at me, and then looked at the peaks. "I doubt." she said, "if he was alive or sensible to any emotions such as you hint at. I doubt if there were any room in his sordid soul save for gain, for lucre, for gold."

I was silent a moment, for the dart, unconsciously barbed, had gone home to me once more. I walked uncomfortably with my conscience when I walked with Miss Varley.

"Yes," I said, at last, "you are right. There was no room for anything but gold in his mind. It is so adventurers inherit the earth, not the meek and lowly and the humble of spirit. Adventurers and those heroes, the merchant princes—the world yields her treasure to these. It is sad, but we cannot remake the universe, and there must be purpose in it."

Somewhere from behind the scrub of trees which screened the joint camps issued the tinkle of a banjo, and voices raised in song.

Miss Varley smiled. "Is that an answer?" she asked, with a little irony. "Do we live for that?"

"It is a diversion, by the way," I said firmly.

"On the way to what?"

She turned without waiting for an answer, and began the descent of the slopes. The absurd banjo which Cassilis had drawn from the receses of his baggage twanged on the evening air.

"It is rather pretty in effect," admitted Miss Varley, as I overtook her. We walked down in silence, listening, and now the gurgling of a stream joined the harmonies of voice and instrument.

"What nonsense is he singing?" asked my companion, smiling.

I couldn't catch the words, but I remembered Kipling, and I quoted:

"The tunes that mean so much to you alone—
Common tunes that make you choke and blow your nose,
Vulgar tunes that bring the laugh that brings the groan—
I can rip your very heartstrings out with those."

"You *do* feel like that, too?" she asked suddenly. "I thought I was foolish. Oh, it's all nonsense, but——"

Never had I seen my marble queen touched to such mere human issues. Her pleasure flowed over her in a warm gush. The inane strings of the banjo, heard in that desolate wilderness, had moved her, broken her down.

"I am Memory, I am Torment—I am Town!
I am all that ever went with evening dress!"

Had not the Cordillera perhaps had its play also with this soul, and was it now newly humanized and recovered for emotion?

CHAPTER VII.

A PARTING OF THE WAYS.

That night, I remember, Houston spoke of the pass, and of the *Montaña* beyond. He spoke as if he took it for granted that our ways would now diverge. The Pass del Fuego lay at the head of the valley, and was one of the easiest into the back country of the Amazon waters. Miss Varley said very little, beyond putting a question or two, but Mrs. Chester displayed considerable eagerness to learn more of the *Montaña,* and showed also a certain sentiment at the prospect of our parting. I noticed this, and that is why, when we had the surprise next morning, I knew for certain that Miss Varley had made up her mind at the last moment. Mrs. Chester no doubt had been informed in the night, but she had not known when she was talking with us that evening.

Houston it was who gave me the information brusquely, and accompanied by the nearest approach to uncivil manners I had ever seen in him.

"Did you know that Miss Varley has decided not to go by the pass? She's going north. Had you anything to do with it?"

I stared at him. "What should I have to do with that lady's plans?" I asked slowly. "I'm delighted to hear we shall have her company a little longer. But will you be good enough to tell me wherein you suppose me to be concerned in her plans?"

He begged pardon after a short pause. "It's put me out, Poindexter. We're just in our last lap, and I guess I'm on edge a bit. Surely you see we can't act until these ladies are gone."

It was true enough, but I don't think I had realized till that moment how little I had been thinking of the Big Fish, and how much of other things.

I made a reluctant assent, qualifying it. "It is not likely that they will delay much longer. I understand that these more fertile valleys have attracted them. The flora is necessarily richer. They will not go beyond the oases."

"No," said Houston. "I suppose not," and he turned away.

There was a succession of valleys on that trail, sheltering a more generous vegetation, and abounding with vicuna and lama and other upland fauna. Houston said nothing after that protest of his, but he seemed to me to have developed, for the first time in my acquaintance with him, a touch of moroseness. He avoided the ladies, and mingled with the mestizos and Indians, making a business of the readjustment of the packs and of the reorganization of the commissariat.

"It is true that we can supply the larder here," he told me over his pipe. "but we don't know how much farther our quest goes. We may be only at the beginning."

That next night we reached a small ravine, embowered in the Sierras, down which a tumbling torrent brawled through the gulches toward the lower levels of the plains; and here we set up the camps. Houston had instructed our Indians to pitch in a grove of trees near the stream, but below this site the valley was broken into rocks and rough places, which made a camp for the ladies inconvenient. Houston suggested a point farther down under cover of brushwood and upon a small ledge which overlooked the water. This, on inspection, both Cassilis and myself pronounced to be an ideal spot, and here accordingly the Indians established the tents.

Houston had picked up toward evening, as though he had outgrown his ungraciousness, and returned to his earlier manner. Indeed, it was his suggestion that Mrs. Chester and Miss Varley should share our supper, which he was at pains to make attractive by delving into our stores. He produced some champagne, of the existence of which I had been unaware. When I said so, he laughed.

"I wanted a few bottles to celebrate the day we should strike it lucky."

He lifted his tin mug toward the ladies. "Here's health, mesdames," and then he looked at me, "and wealth, messieurs." He grinned and drank.

We followed his example. He had shown a nicety in his choice—health to our visitors, wealth to ourselves. And that was the beginning of his social efforts that night. He used his gift of narrative very prettily, surveyed a good deal of his life, and brought to the surface some interesting stories in a rambling, unpretentious, but effective, way. Both Mrs. Chester and Miss Varley listened with evident interest, and seemed to regret when the entertainment ended.

"You know you've seen a good deal, but you couldn't hold an audience like that," whispered Cassilis to me.

"If I had Houston's rich stores to draw on—give me a chance!" I whispered back.

"How much does he leave untold?" murmured Cassilis.

"The shadow of that lies on what he tells," I answered, in the same voice. "Would he hold these ladies were it not for what they suspect?"

"Do you think so?" He sat up. Houston's voice was mellifluously ending. "Do you know, Jack, I think they suspect us all?"

"What, you, too?" I asked dryly.

"You mean Mrs. Chester. I don't know," he said. "I would swear to her genuineness. She is as natural as a kitten. But—but——"

"But she is afraid of you," I interjected brutally.

Cassilis made no answer. The ladies had risen. I do not know what time it was, but the starlight filled the sky, and it was time they were returning to their camp.

Cassilis and I attended them, al-

though the distance was very short. There was the shadow of parting over us all—at least that is what Cassilis and I were feeling. We shepherded the two ladies down to the point where the stream tumbled in a cataract over the ledge, and mounted the small ascent on which the camp had been assembled. Miss Varley and I were in front, and had done with speaking. Something silenced me; perhaps it was my companion's evident distaste for talk. But we could hear Cassilis and Mrs. Chester laughing behind.

I reflected. What I had said was true. For all her gayety there was some fear, some anxiety, at least, in Mrs. Chester's eyes. In the camp there was stillness, for the Indians had settled into the night, and the mules were patiently invisible. I thought I was aware of a shade that flitted among the trees, but it was merely an idle idea. The rumble of the torrent a hundred yards away filled the ears, as an undertone, like the drones of bagpipes.

"Oh, our tent must be over there," Miss Varley intimated, but I only determined what direction she meant by the direction she took. We came to a halt near a spread of canvas.

"Mercedes!" called Mrs. Chester. "I thought our tent was here."

"No, this is it," called back Miss Varley. "I was mistaken at first. It's the difference of the dark."

The others joined us, and we stood for a short time in a knot together, previous to speaking.

"A beautiful night," said Mrs. Chester.

"It's pretty cold," said Cassilis. "I should advise you to keep up a good fire."

Instinctively we all looked at the fire, which was sinking low into gray ashes.

Nevertheless, it lit up a slice of the foreground, the fall of the rock outward, and the gray deeps below.

"I hadn't realized we were so near to the edge," said Miss Varley. "Yes, I think we'd better take your advice about the fire," she added, and stepped forward.

"Let me," I said, and slipped past her to where the pile of fuel was heaped. I seized two logs, and moved toward the fire, Miss Varley at my heels.

Suddenly I was conscious that my feet had gone from the earth, and that I was falling. I fell, clutching. I heard Cassilis call out; and some one scream.

I was aware now that the log I held was caught over my head, and that I was hanging from it. Cassilis' voice came down to me.

"Holding on, Jack? Wait a bit."

He seized my right arm and pulled upward. Eased by that relief of weight, I struggled upward, and, floundering, came to land again. Then I wiped the marks of the struggle from my clothes, and began to give attention.

"What was it?" I asked.

Cassilis was peering into a sort of hole. He threw a log on the fire. It blazed, and he stooped and peered again. I joined him.

"Oh, be careful," called Miss Varley.

Cassilis was muttering something. "A trap—a regular trap," he said. I began to turn over the sticks that he had revealed. In a few minutes it was as clear as daylight, and Cassilis and I ceased our explanation. Miss Varley had joined us.

"I'm afraid your Indians pitched too near the edge," said Cassilis.

"But that's exactly what has been puzzling me," said she. "I remember the tent was quite some distance away. I don't understand."

"Wait a moment," I said, and, slipping away, I climbed down from the ledge to the lower level, and began an inspection.

As far as I could judge, the drop was at this point about fifteen feet, a sufficient fall to imperil the limbs of the unconscious human being who should walk into the trap. But for the billet of wood I carried, I should have gone down into a sort of oubliette. It was constituted by a chasm between the rocks, and had been carefully concealed from view by twigs, and grass, and leaves. By whom? And with what design? Who had shifted the tent forward to the margin of the ledge?

I came back with these puzzles in my head.

"Well?" said Miss Varley.

"It would have been a nasty fall if I had gone all the way," I answered lightly.

"Yes, I suppose so." Was there something dry in her voice?

"It's lucky you had the wood," said Cassilis, as lightly as I.

"Most fortunate," agreed Miss Varley.

I was making an examination of the vicinity, and testing the ground about the tent.

"Oh, I think we're all right now," she said, in that curious voice.

I felt awkward. Mrs. Chester gushed very naturally and pleasantly as to her relief that the accident was no worse.

"Well, it's getting late," said Miss Varley. "We must say good night." She was a figure black against the leaping firelight, and I could not see her face. "I think also it will be good-by. We must start for the *Montaña* tomorrow."

There was a stifled exclamation, hardly that, from Mrs. Chester.

"Thanks so much for all you've done for us," said that little woman nervously, taking her cue. She put out a hand uncertainly, and then half withdrew it. I saw Cassilis capture it. Miss Varley turned to the tent. "Good night," she called.

Our responses followed her lamely into the darkness, and Mrs. Chester extricated her hand and fled, leaving us there. Without a word we departed.

"Jack," said Cassilis presently, in a subdued voice, "that trap was laid."

"Yes," I assented.

"A fall would break a—a person's leg or arm."

"Yes," I said.

"We were there merely by accident," he pursued.

"There would have been an accident if we hadn't been there," I said abruptly.

"Then you see it as I do?" he said, relieved.

"How was it possible to avoid seeing?" I asked. "And what is more, Miss Varley saw it."

"Does she suspect——" he began.

I groaned. "Oh, the Lord knows what. You remember Coop?"

"I've been trying to forget."

"He was quite stupid with anger this morning when he heard they were going on."

"I think he's mad," said Cassilis.

"There's method in his madness," I replied. "I thought I saw a shad—— Oh, well, we can prove nothing. He has the Indians in hand. We are merely ciphers."

"I begin to think we have been that all along," said Cassilis.

Houston was seated by the fire smoking when we reached the camp, and looked up on our approach. I could not honestly say he had a guilty look.

"Miss Varley nearly had an accident at her camp," I blurted out.

"Accident!" He withdrew his pipe, and stared. "I hope nothing——"

"A plant had been prepared—earth placed over a hole, and the trap disguised. If she had fallen through she would have broken her ankle."

"She didn't, then. I'm glad."

"And she would have been obliged to turn back to civilization," I added, paying no heed.

Houston pulled at his pipe. "I wish she would go back, but I'm glad she didn't hurt herself," he said.

I thought I saw Cassilis' shoulders go up.

"Well, they're not going any farther," I said bluntly.

"I'm glad—I'm sincerely glad," said Houston. "That's the best news I've had to-day, Poindexter. Women are well enough in their place, but it must be after the markets. We're out for something more than kisses; kisses are a by-product. And, mark you, it's not certain we're clear of Werner's gang."

He shook his head, filled his pipe again, and talked cheerfully. The man, inhuman as we were conceiving him, was human in that moment to his finger nails. He was almost a model of the genial and affable companion, and we sat talking for half an hour on the route ere we parted. Cassilis lingered with

me ere retiring. After a silence he said, and it sounded oddly enough:

"She's not afraid of me, Jack."

I gathered his meaning slowly, and answered: "It's a rum juncture at which to make that discovery."

"Oh, I could tell, I could tell," he protested, and we were silent again.

"Well, I'm afraid myself," I said at last, "but I don't quite know what of. It seems to me that the curtain's going up again. I think it's Coop."

"I'm not afraid of Coop now," said Cassilis cheerfully.

"Then you can thank Heaven your nerves are in a better state than mine," I replied, as I went into the tent.

When I got up next morning I noticed that Cassilis was absent, and he did not appear until the breakfast was well advanced. Houston made no comment. It was Cassilis who explained.

"Saying good-by," he said easily.

Half an hour later I saw Miss Varley's mules moving. The party were advancing along the bottom, and, turning a corner, were lost to sight almost immediately. Houston had gone, and Cassilis was engaged in some task. I rose, and climbed a rise a hundred yards away. Below I could see the train defiling up the valley. We had parted for good, so to speak, last night. I descended into the open valley, and caught them up.

Mrs. Chester hailed me weakly, I thought. Miss Varley bent her head to my salutation.

"I had to come to say good-by, and wish you well," I got forth stumblingly.

"Has Mr. Houston come, too?" she asked, looking toward the ridge.

I flushed. "No. I know nothing about him," I said sharply. "I only answer for myself. I wanted to say good-by."

"I fancy it was time we did," she said slowly. "We have wasted too much time already."

Her words were innocuous in themselves, but I seemed to read something into them.

"The meaning of the word is God be with you, Miss Varley," I said, looking her straight in the face.

"Yes," she nodded. "We will leave it at that then. Neither of us could better it. Good-by, Mr. Poindexter—that is, God be with you."

She turned away, and she had not offered her hand. Mrs. Chester, as she went, gave me a frightened glance. I stood, my heart sunk in a sudden wretchedness, and watched the procession pass. It passed and faded out of sight, among the broken vegetation of the valley.

I was conscious at the last of that frightened glance, and, as I walked back, mortified and gloomy, I wondered what was the significance. Was it really fear it held; or was it appeal or deprecation?

CHAPTER VIII.

THE CLIFF.

That day we left the comparatively opulent life of the valley, and moved again among the naked Sierras. Houston was in amazing spirits, laughing and talking, and rendering himself agreeable, and as active as a bee in all the business of the advance. As he drew nearer to the goal for which we had striven so long and so terribly, he displayed himself at his best. That night he told us that we were within thirty-six hours of Astarnok.

"You may take it at that," he said, "though I'm not sure to a point or two. The fact is, I shall have to lay a course, in nautical phrase."

"Have you been there?" asked Cassilis.

"Within a short distance of it," he replied, fingering his beard. "It's not what you understand by a village—in fact, it's a station of the dead. It was once inhabited, but is now deserted—long since. No; there was never anything to draw a man there, no prospect of reefs, nothing. That is why Raymond hid his secret there, no doubt."

It was, of course, impossible to resist the contagion of the fever. Despite what we knew, what we thought we knew, and what we guessed, Cassilis and I were inflamed by talk like this.

The secret of the Incas' treasure lay within thirty-six hours of us!

"To-morrow," said Houston, still fingering his beard, "I shall have to trig a course, to make sure. There are so many valleys and gulches here. We might miss this one a hundred times. If I can figure out one I know I can find the temple at Astarnok."

"The temple!" I echoed.

"Yes, it's Inca work—some say pre-Inca work—Chimu. But it's never been explored or excavated." He thumped his side suddenly. "What if it should be there! But no, it would be too obvious. Raymond wouldn't——"

He sank into ruminating silence, in which there seemed even a touch of moodiness.

Some time after noon on the following day we had reached a level among the crags which Houston declared suitable for his observations. It was a wild scene, the barren grandeur of which affected one's nerves. So far as the eye could see northward, cap beyond cap of the Cordilleras pierced the heaven; long ranges, all white, ribbed the horizon, intricately confused. Southward a great precipice cut us off from the more gracious country of the valleys; and our immediate surroundings displayed the work of frost and snow at those elevations.

The earth was destitute of any growing thing, and strewn with bowlders as after some huge blasting operation of nature. The sun beat upon us hot as in the tropics, and we had cast off our coats to walk. We took food in an aerie on the heights, and surveyed our destination.

"Yonder," said Houston, indicating merely distance. "But which of the gullies I don't know, and shan't until I've trigged the place. I shall want the help of both of you."

Neither Cassilis nor I had more than a rudimentary acquaintance with the science which thus mapped out continents and measured mountains. But we were willing, even eager, to assist.

"I'll call on you when the preliminary preparations are made," said Houston. "The Indians can do those things. Afterward they will be no use."

Cassilis and I sat and eased our limbs, and talked and smoked for some time, and presently Houston returned.

"Cassilis, will you go with Diego?" he said. "Across the gully, and up the hill yonder. I'll join you afterward. We've got to fix up a base line."

When the others had gone, Houston turned to me. "Now we can get to work," he said, showing his even teeth in a curious smile. His eyes were narrowed to points in deep sockets. "Can you use a theodolite?" he asked.

I shook my head. "Never mind. I'll manage without that if you only follow instructions carefully. I've put up one side of the base beyond there. I want to triangulate with the hill on which Cassilis is."

It was all to me double Dutch, but I accepted it on faith, and obeyed like a schoolboy. Houston took some instrument from his pocket, adjusted it on a tripod, and squinted along it. He shook his head. "Not far enough back," he said, while I watched him with interest. "I'll get the angle directly."

We picked our way among the rocks to a point where the ridge sloped outward, and once more he set up his instrument. Still he seemed discontented. I looked to the hill beyond, and I thought I could see some of the pack mules winding along its side.

"Wait a bit," said Houston, as if sudden inspiration had come to him. "Do you see that rock? Pace beyond it, counting as you go, until I call stop."

I walked to the rock. "Now?" I asked.

"Yes. Count!" came Houston's voice clearly to me.

I walked forward and counted. I was aware that I was reaching the edge of a cliff that I could not see beyond. It did not seem as if I could walk many yards farther in safety. Twenty—twenty-one—twenty-two I counted. The rock hid me from Houston—and then I fell.

The whole earth shifted under me, and I went down. As I did so, there flashed in my mind the fall in front of

Miss Varley's tent; but the thought was only instantaneous, for I remembered nothing after that.

I conjectured afterward that I had been struck by one of the huge stones which the dislodgment of the cliff had brought down with me. At any rate, I must have been stunned, and remained unconscious for some time. The sun was shining brightly when I opened my eyes, and slowly took in my position.

I had fallen some thirty feet, but the fall had been broken by the débris among which I lay. The slope of the cliff was steep, but not perpendicular. It was composed of loose rubble and stones, and on the first movement I made I began to go down with it. I clutched heavily at the treacherous cliff, and slowly my downward movement ceased.

I began to examine my position carefully. I saw now that I was in immediate danger, if the loose stones were disturbed, of going down a chute into the depth below. I had no means of seeing what lay in that depth, because I could not wheel my eyes downward beyond a certain projecting ledge some hundred feet lower. If I reached that ledge, and it held, I might have a chance. I saw no other.

I glanced upward, for I was able to do that better the way I lay, and I saw overhead a number of menacing bowlders. The cliff was alive with eyes watching me, and threatening doom. I feared the fierce onslaught of those huge crags, which appeared to rest on the soil with no roots, and lean toward me.

Again my eyes went down as far as their range. The ledge outstanding, yet not in a direct line, invited them. Below and beyond I vaguely guessed at an empty chasm from which there was a dull roaring. Was it a torrent from the glaciers higher up? I had lost my sense of direction, and knew nothing. The sun blazed like an instrument of torture.

I don't know what started the idea in my mind, unless it was the quickened senses under the inspiration of peril. I suddenly thought of homeopathy. The idea in that juxtaposition sounds ridiculous. It was ridiculous, but life is ridiculous, and, if we have a sense of humor, death also. At any rate, the idea of homeopathy entered my mind, dribbling in, as I stared at the hot sky.

"Small doses!" I repeated it to myself. "Small doses of the poison."

That was the secret. If I struggled I should fall in a shower of débris that would amount to a small landslip. But let me wriggle!

I wriggled. I felt the earth and stones move round me. In a sort of moving matrix I was shepherded downward one yard, two yards—I came to a pause.

Surely now I had the secret. Yes; it was homeopathy. I wriggled again, and the pebbles escorted me a yard or two lower. A third time I repeated the maneuver, and this time one of the larger rocks joined morosely in the movement, and, rolling into the vacuum I had made, struck my head.

For some minutes—I know not how many—I was still, dumb, incapable of motion; merely aware of the hot sun. Then I recovered, took a grip of my courage and wits, and moved again——

It would be wearisome to take you through that terrible downward course. At one point—whether I had moved with too much energy, or the stones were loose, I don't know—I descended with a rush for a dozen feet or more, and was only held up by a protruding rock more deeply imbedded than usual. When I got back my breath I hardly dared stir, but by degrees I regained confidence, and advanced once more. It must have been fully two hours ere I reached the ledge——

It was an insecure resting place, after all, but I was now able to look down, and see what lay beyond it. There was an abrupt fall of some eighty feet, and then a fierce torrent swirling at the base of the cliff. Sick at heart after all my exertions, I found my position even worse than it had been originally. The ledge absolutely overhung the precipice, and I seemed to have arrived at a deadlock. I lay on my side, sweating with my exertions, and looked out from my

aerie as it were an eagle's upon the rocky plain below.

The heat of the sun, though now far gone in its declension, affected me in my weakened state of nerves and muscles. I dozed. When I awoke there was something in the plain below, which made me sit up and stare.

It was some one riding on a mule—no, there were two people. They drew nearer, and halted, as if uncertain of their direction, some half a mile away. At first I took them to be two of our party, and then I saw I was wrong, for while one was plainly an Indian, the other was unmistakably a woman.

I rose on my ledge, and cried aloud. I shouted, and I gesticulated. The woman started her mule up the bed of the river, and the Indian followed. I redoubled my efforts, and I thought I saw the Indian's face turn in my direction. The mules stopped, and it seemed as if a consultation was in progress. Then the mules were pulled round, and came slowly toward me. Again they stopped, and again they went on, but this time the halt seemed to have been to consider a plan of campaign. I lost sight of them behind a bluff.

It may have been an hour later, when I had given up all hope, that I heard some one calling to me away on the right. Some bushes here joined with the rough ground to make a sort of low wall thirty yards away. The face of an Indian was peering through, and he was shouting words I could not make out. Then there was a silence, and suddenly he appeared again, busy with something; he moved to the edge of the firm rock, and whirled a rope about his head. I understood—it was a lariat.

The rope swung, twisting light, easily, as a thing alive in the sunlight, and fell with unerring accuracy on the ledge at my feet. I thanked God and the Indian for that trick of the plains. But what did it there in exhibition among the tenantless mountains of Peru? I dismissed the vague wonder, and eagerly grasped the hitch of the rope, passing over my head and under my arms. The Indian nodded, and began to pull.

I reached safety amid a constant stream and rush of débris, bruised, torn, and breathless, but unbroken; and beyond the scrub I came face to face with Miss Varley.

"You are not hurt?" she asked quickly, and without salutation; and upon my reply in the negative, said: "It looked an ugly situation."

"It was," I answered, "and I owe you my grateful thanks for the rescue."

"I don't know that we can talk about it in such heroic terms," said Miss Varley, and unexpectedly added: "There is something else. I have something to say to you."

"Won't you sit?" I asked, looking at the rocks, and with a somewhat ridiculous assumption of drawing-room manners. I was not conscious of my tattered garments; nor was she. I wondered at her face, and was wondering when she spoke. Why was she here, miles away from the pass into the *Montaña?*

"Three of my Indians have come back from Arequipa," she began abruptly.

I took this in, but it didn't, at first, at any rate, seem significant. She continued as abruptly:

"I sent them down some time ago for supplies and—other things. They returned last night."

As she paused I interjected a vague commonplace. She had the appearance of one preoccupied with distress.

"It's wonderful how these native Indians do find their way about," was what I said.

I don't know that she heard. She spoke in a level and rather hard voice, and looked at the glittering valley. "About a week ago I came upon a dying man. He had been shot and left for dead. It was in the range back yonder."

I was listening now with both ears straining, and with a heart that beat rather fast.

"When he revived under the influence of a little brandy, I heard a tale from him. It was plain he was far gone, and I doubted if he would ever travel a day's journey. Yet that was

the only chance, and he begged for it—to be sent down to Arequipa. So I sent him—under the care of the three Indians—those that returned last night."

I understood. It was Coop! Coop in life or in death was bound about my neck like a millstone.

"You came to tell me this?" I said, after a silence.

"I thought you could make your own deductions," she said coldly.

"Please let me understand," I persisted. "Why is it necessary that I should know that the three Indians returned last night?"

Something flashed in her face, and a baffled look succeeded. "We had pitched camp in a gully on the Sierra," she said, in a monotonous voice, "and later I wandered out and explored. There was a moon, and it showed me men on mules busy in a fold of the rocks below. I went nearer, and saw them—the face of one quite clearly. They were armed, and I didn't reveal myself. I don't know, but I thought they were perhaps on some unholy errand. There was a tent. The moon shone on it. I saw the men go in, and the one whose face I saw came out last, and lifted his gun and strode off after the others. When they were gone I descended carefully to the tent, and looked in. There was a man dying there, a man with a bullet wound left for dead."

Coop! Cassilis had been right. Never would the shadow of Coop lift from our lives!

"And the man whose face you saw?" I said hoarsely.

She turned away, and said nothing.

"Why do you tell me this?" I asked angrily. "Is it merely sport, or justice?"

"It is neither," she said. "I don't know why. It is perhaps because I am not certain. I don't know."

"You thought that the man was killed by us?" I demanded.

"I had every reason to think so," she replied. "He told me his tale."

A dozen emotions and thoughts were stirring me. This, then, was the explanation of Coop's disappearance. It did not lie at Houston's door at all. How far had that cowardice, that inaction, that abstention of Cassilis and myself been responsible for the tragedy? I dared not attempt to clear myself. I stood silent; and then sense woke in me again.

"You want me to defend myself?" I asked defiantly.

"I never thought of that. What defense is there? No; I think I was merely influenced by a desire for fair play. Even the criminal should have his chances. That is why I told you about the Indians."

"I do not understand," I said dully. "What have I to do with the Indians? The man's dead, and——"

"The man reached Arequipa safely," she interposed. "He had told me his story, and why you were wanted. He wished to go back and inform the authorities. He wanted to do his duty before he died."

I stared. "What story did he tell you?" I asked, in a quiet voice.

She did not hesitate; she seemed now to have made up her mind to go through with it. "Of your offense against the law, of his pursuit, and of your—your vengeance on him. He was resolved to put the law on your tracks, if he should live." She shifted her gaze to me. "That is why I thought you ought to know."

"I wonder," I said steadily, regarding her, "I wonder just how much you meant to extend the quality of mercy to the criminal. You told me that I ought to know—but what? I know from you that this man, Coop, was conducted by your servants to Arequipa. Is that the extent of my knowledge?"

I could not help the hardness of my voice. It seemed once more as if we were engaged in a battle to the death with Coop. I felt all the old, fierce feelings, the joy of fight rising with resistance, the callousness in the face of suffering. Coop had threatened us in his death. He threatened us again in his resurrection.

"What am I to know?" I demanded.

"The man, Coop, as you call him, has communicated with the authorities,"

she said. "There is an armed expedition sent after you."

I could have burst into laughter in her face; so amazing was the irony of it all. We had feared Coop, but Coop dead, the spirit of Coop brooding malevolently over those who left him to die in the wilderness. We had never for a moment thought of this, of Coop alive, Coop twisting on his sick bed in his obdurate, tricky cockney way, to play the cards against us. The authorities! An armed expedition! I could have shouted with laughter.

"Thank you," was all I said. "Now we know where we are. You have consented to give us, then, a sporting chance, so to speak."

"I don't understand terms of that sort," she replied coldly. "I came to the conclusion that you ought to know."

I wondered why. And then, revolving in my mind all the circumstances of the case—what she had seen, her natural suspicions, what she had heard to confirm these—I felt of a sudden that I was doing her an injustice in that hour of bitter chagrin.

"You are very kind," I said earnestly. "I am doubly in your debt. You saved my life just now on the cliff side. You would now save my—my name."

"Your life!" she echoed, looking startled.

"Yes; didn't you know that?" I asked. "Nothing could have saved me if it hadn't been for the lariat. I wonder where that man of yours got his knowledge of it. The Indians here are not accustomed to make use of the lasso."

She did not answer that, but asked: "How was it you were on the cliff?"

I looked upward toward the hill in the fading light. Problems began to crowd upon me. I did not expect to see Houston's face peering over the mountainside, alert, cruel, dominant. I had dismissed Houston from my mind from the first moment of my recovery. But now he came back, an offensive figure, and I knew he could not be so dismissed.

"You remember that unstable piece of ground by your tent?" I asked slowly.

"Yes," she nodded, and our eyes met. "You knew?"

"I think I did. I guessed, at any rate. Well, to think that the trick could be repeated on me! Upon my soul, I deserved all I got."

"Repeated! What do you mean?" she asked quickly.

I threw my hand upward. "A queasy piece of earth, rotten, undermined. A wink is as good as a nod, don't they say?"

She drew a long breath. "You mean it was undermined, prepared—like—like——"

"Yes," I assented. "We are having open confession to-day."

"But that man—what did he want—why should he——"

She broke off.

"He has his reasons," I said. "Reasons which applied to you, too. I think he only meant you to injure yourself superficially—a broken arm——"

She laughed scornfully. "And you?" she said finally.

"That is another matter," I said, and there was silence.

Suddenly I added: "There is Cassilis."

"Yes, yes," she said, in distress. "What is to be done?"

CHAPTER IX.

WHAT HAPPENED IN THE STARLIGHT.

It was darkening toward evening, and as yet I knew nothing of her own personal situation. My own, and its relation to her, had absorbed all our interest.

"You ask what is to be done," I said, "when all is done." It was brutal. But I was a mere barbarian just then.

"No," she answered, more quietly. "You are between two fires, but everything is not accomplished. You are in danger from the authorities, and also from this man, Houston. The question is: Which is the greater peril?"

"You take an interest in our peril?" I murmured.

"I shouldn't be here if I didn't," she said bitterly. "I am a fool for my pains."

"You can be sorry, and yet have no faith. It's good of you," I said. "Only a woman could be so generous. You think us guilty, and yet would help us."

"Not—not that man," she cried.

"Then," I said triumphantly, "you have doubts as to our guilt."

She shook her head. "I wish I could."

"You have," I declared eagerly. "And you are justified. Coop lied, whatever story he told you. We are not malefactors, and he has no authority to represent the law."

"But he was wounded—and left to——"

She was looking at me, and my eyes fell. "He was wounded in fair fight. He forced it on us, nor was it Cassilis or I who wounded him."

"I knew *that!*" she cried.

"Yes, but there is worse," I said, in shame. "When you saw us we were searching for him. He had been our antagonist, a troublesome antagonist. He had no right where he was, tracking us. We are prospectors, you see, and we have, or think we have, a rich find. This man pursued us. He had no right. There is no law runs in this wilderness save that of might."

"Yes, yes, I understand," she said eagerly.

"We found him ill, wounded. We left him."

There was a silence, in which I was conscious of the flood of water roaring below. I broke it at last.

"It is no use to say that we repented, Cassilis and I, and came back in the night; but he was gone."

"Yes," she breathed deeply. "We found him." And she added, as if to herself: "You came back."

I stirred. "Now you must let me put you on your way, as night is coming on."

"You must come back with me to the camp," she said hurriedly. "Manuel knows the way. You can't go back to Houston."

"I must go back to Cassilis," I said.

"Cassilis—yes. Freda——" She was silent.

"Does Mrs. Chester know all this?" I asked.

"Freda knows everything, but she didn't believe—at least, not after—she doesn't believe now."

"And you?" I asked gently.

"I suppose I have never been tempted," she said slowly. "But I think I could understand later. If I was wrong and mistaken in one thing, I may be mistaken in another. I am not hard, only ignorant."

"You are divinely merciful," I said.

"I have betrayed you to Coop and your enemies," she said, with a sudden wildness. "They will be upon you. You must came back with me."

I shook my head, smiling. "You know I can't."

"No, you can't. There's your friend. If it should be too late! Why does he —— Is he afraid of you, as he was of Coop?"

"Some day I will tell you. I must find Cassilis now. I must see you on your way. Where is your camp?"

"You needn't trouble about me. I have Manuel. I'm not afraid."

"I never thought you were. I can't conceive of you afraid."

"Can't you? I can. I have been. I am in dreams."

"Dreams! Ah! We are not responsible for dreams. Miss Varley, I am deeply grateful to you. And, though you may not think it, I value your good will very much. I should like you to have as good an opinion of me as you can. Believe me, I'm not a malefactor. You know the worst."

"You have said that law does not run in the wilderness. Does that apply also to ethics?"

"I wonder what you or I would be if left to the mercies of the wilderness for years?"

"I am no one's judge," she said. "For Heaven's sake, don't think me a prig."

"I think you goodness itself. Good-by."

I held out my hand. The shades of the evening were falling, and I had

work. Should I ever see her again? She had never yet touched my hand. Now she did so, and sent a glow through me.

"Thank you," I said, turning. "And now for Cassilis!"

Mine was the upward road across that accursed hill, and I paused once or twice to watch her go—till she passed out of sight toward the valley. By the time I had scaled the height, night was imminent. The cold was intense; the stars shone; I saw bleak peaks in heaven. Somewhere across the next ravine of rocks Cassilis had departed with Diego. I recalled how I had seen the mules winding about the spur. I descended into the chasm, and the darkness closed in on me.

I had no definite plan in my head. My only idea was that I must warn Cassilis of Houston's treachery. Quite evidently Houston had no further use for us. He had secured the knowledge of Raymond's secret through us, and perforce had taken us in as partners and associates. That silenced us, and prevented a hostile and rival expedition. Now that he was so close upon his treasure, there was no need for ceremony with us; we had become mere encumbrances, whom it were well to drop casually.

I could not doubt that he had his Indians bound to him, and I distrusted Diego, the mestizo, in particular, for a consummate villain. It was he whom I suspected of the trap before Miss Varley's tent.

When I reached the summit of the farther hill, I walked wrapped in night, but able to discern the upstanding rocks. Here there was no movement or sign of life, and only a gurgling noise witnessed to the fall of a small stream among the rocks. I proceeded beside this downward toward the bottom for some time, and going under its cover, so to speak, I made no audible sound on the stones.

Presently I came abruptly to a stop, for the faint starlight showed me something moving not far away. I became as motionless as the rocks about me, and watched.

So far as I could make out, it was a man busy with a pile of stones, but it was long before I was able to determine what he was doing. Then at last I noticed that the heap was diminishing. As he went on, he flung stone after stone aside, and then he would peer down on the heap, and next throw more stones away, and peer again. Seeing the man so absorbed in his work, and knowing that the water drowned all the sound of my footsteps, I approached nearer and strove to solve the riddle. The man was working furiously, and something in his gestures seemed familiar. I passed in mental review Houston, dismissed him, and was pulled up at the thought of Diego. I had guessed the identity beyond a doubt. It was the mestizo who was at work in this odd, furtive manner under the stars.

And then, coming from I know not what source, a horrible fear rose in me. Those stones! I knew them. They formed a cairn, a tumulus. Was treasure underneath?

Suddenly Diego paused in his work, and backed away. Then a horrid scream of fear rent the air about me, and he began to run wildly away. I loosened my gun, which I still retained, and moved forward. Out of the débris of the stones something rose, something dark, mysterious, and unrecognizable. Was it an animal? My heart beat hard as I gazed. Then in the faint light the thing detached itself from the shadows and the darkness, and became individual. It crept and staggered, but I knew it.

"Cassilis!" I shouted, but I don't know that my voice carried far. I was vaguely conscious that it was weak and thin, like a reed squeaking in my throat. Well, at any rate, I had the use of my limbs. Diego was flying furiously, a black and dwindling shadow. I ran forward.

"Cassilis!" I cried. The stumbling figure seemed to turn its head, and then to gather speed and run at an incredible pace for one so crouched and doubled. It ran along the rocky margin of the torrent.

"Cassilis!" I cried, pursuing it. Cassilis arisen from that tomb among the rocks! I ran blunderingly, but the poor thing in front of me sped the faster, as if terror were at its elbow, the torrent roared and swallowed my voice. I was gaining nothing, yes, something, a little on that stricken creature. It vanished ahead. And the hill ceased, and there was a precipice below me.

I came to a pause on the brink of the gulf. The torrent roared and spouted, as it pitched itself into the void down to some unplumbed depths below. Had Cassilis gone over? Had that thing which had seemed Cassilis, a blighted, broken, frightened thing, stumbled over and gone headlong downward?

I shuddered and turned back. I was drawn to that mysterious stack of stones higher up. Reaching it, I made an examination of the ground, and fumbled among the rocks nervously. I was afraid, I think, of what I should find there. I turned over a stone larger than others, and by the light of my electric torch which I still carried I scrutinized it. I recoiled from the stain upon it, and stood up.

I saw all now. This, then, had been the fate destined for Cassilis. He had been shot or stabbed and buried under a cairn. But what was Diego doing there? What was the meaning of his stealthy nocturnal mission to the place where the dead had been laid? Dead! It came to me with swift horror. He had not been dead. That thing I had seen staggering, loping, flying for life had been a maimed and wounded man, but not a dead man. From the tomb the dead had risen and scared the vulture at his work. Cassilis!

I turned back again. I must find out what had happened to him. I must descend the rocks in the valley where the water fell. It was a precipitous way, and I struggled down among the bowlders, supporting myself by them, until I reached the bottom.

The drop was, as near as I could estimate, forty feet, and the mass of water came over with a mighty roar. It spread in a pool below, and thence rushed down into a bigger volume of water, which drained the gully at that part. There was only the starlight to assist me, for my small torch was only of use in detail, and I experienced some difficulty in searching the banks. I was conscious, moreover, with a sickly feeling in my heart, that no one could have fallen in that water slide and lived. I made search as far as the junction of the torrent with the more spacious, easier-flowing stream, but I saw no sign of any body. It was probable that any thing tossed by the torrent into the smoother and deeper flood would have been swept away long since into the valleys below.

I came back with all hope gone, yet reluctant to leave the scene. It seemed so terrible a way in which to part from a friend one had left straight, tall, and stalwart a few hours earlier—that he should have gone to his doom, a stricken creature, flying in panic from the very man who would have stood by him to the end. A gulp came into my throat—and then my heart leaped in exultation. At the distance of a hundred yards or so was a man's figure detaching itself weakly from the darkness. I moved toward it with a cry of welcome.

The next moment I had stayed my steps. This was not Cassilis, but another. The figure advanced toward me quickly, and now I saw that it was not an Indian, but a white man, and that it was not Houston.

"Can't wish you 'Good day' very well," he said, when he reached me. "and 'Good night's' out, too. We'll rest content with 'Howdy.' Who are you, anyway?"

He was peering into my face as he spoke, more nearly than civil usages seemed to permit; and thus I got a good sight of him. The stranger was a man somewhat over middle height, of a dark, flat face with inconspicuous features, and the general impression I got was repellent.

"I'm a mining prospector. Who are you?" I asked bluntly in my turn.

"Ditto to you," he answered, with a laugh. "But you answer to a name, don't you? Mine's O'Rourke."

I responded: "Mine's Poindexter."

"I got you!" he said suddenly, and clapped a pistol to my forehead. "Better go easy, man. It's a hair trigger." He whistled, and swore, for the noise of the water drowned out his whistle. "Step lively," he adjured, "this is all-fired cold, and I've been out for days, it seems."

I made no movement, nor was I foolish enough to let my hands go down to my pockets.

"Who are you, and by what right do you hold me up?" I asked.

"Right of this," he said, jogging the cold barrel against my face. "Come along."

There was a sharp report at the back of my head, which made me start, and he laughed uproariously, as at a good joke.

"Scared you, hey? I've worked that trick before."

From the acrid smell of powder, I gathered that he had let off another pistol in his other hand, by way of challenge, intimidation, or signal. It proved to be the latter, for I suddenly perceived a second figure running out of the night toward us. I had already had time to sum up the situation, and to make a guess at what had happened.

The second man arrived on the scene, and addressed the other with a high-pitched voice, which I seemed to recognize.

"Bagged him, Jeff?" he said exultantly. "I reckon that gives us the cinch." He came up to me, and seized an arm. "It's no use you making any kick, young man," he said. "You're as good as dead if you do. Haul him along, Jeff."

It certainly seemed that with a loaded revolver menacing me, and two stalwart ruffians by my side, discretion was the wiser counsel. I signified my intention to follow, if they would release me.

"The cards are against me," I said, "though I'm hanged if I know what it all means. Unless you're actually going to commit me to sudden death, I'll come along quietly. I'm a bit played out to-night."

The man Jeff's hand went into my pocket and extracted my revolver. "All right," he said. "You can ease up, Maddock."

"I fancy I must have had the pleasure of making Mr. Maddock's acquaintance at some time," I said. "Was it in Timbuctoo? Or maybe Tokyo? It seems worlds away. And we renew it under strange circumstances. Fate is odd."

"Fate will be a whole lot odder if I use my butt on your teeth," responded Maddock, in a petulant way.

Jeff laughed. "Oh, he's good enough for you, Maddock," he said. "He's prime fed and fattened. I like a deal with that sort; and so, I reckon, will Werner."

Of course, I had known it almost from the first. These were members of Werner's gang—the "Black Gang," as Houston had called them—whom Coop had put on the track of our expedition. I said no more, but was busy with sundry speculations during the progress of the next twenty minutes. You see, for one thing, I had undergone a mental revolution. I did not know now quite where I stood; my world was topsy-turvy.

Behind a bluff in the hills, a welcome fire glowed and sparkled. I was dead weary, and I remembered that I had had no food since midday, since which time I had passed through some curious experiences.

"I hope," said I, as we reached the camp, "that this will prove as comfortable as it looks, for I have a hearty appetite."

Jeff guffawed, and the miserable Maddock whined and jangled out something to my detriment and to the disadvantage of my future disposal. But it was plain these were not the master hands, and I awaited Werner with some curiosity. This was soon assuaged, for as we came up the flap of a tent was lifted, and a thick, square form stood in the entrance.

"It's Poindexter, isn't it?" he called out.

"Right enough," said Jeff, expectorating. "An easy cop."

"I thought it was, from the glasses,"

said the other. "I'm glad. We'll make him welcome. How are you, Poindexter?"

"Rather tired, and very hungry," I replied.

He stared at me. "I hope we'll do a deal this time," he said. "Jeff, let them fetch food here. I could do with a snack myself."

He entered the tent, and emerged with something in his hand. The fire was leaping among the brushwood Jeff had thrown on.

"Will you give me your parole?" asked Werner.

"I will for the next hour," I said.

I caught flashes of his face in the firelight, and it was sardonically amused. "All right; we can afford that," he said. "Drink?"

I saw he had a bottle and a glass in his hands, and I assented. I drank a long drink of weak whisky and cold mountain water, and felt better.

"We haven't got much of that," said Werner, seating himself. "That's your fault, Poindexter. If we hadn't had to scurry from London——"

"I thought you had plenty of time," I interposed, shooting at random.

The light was red on his full, dark face, and he scowled.

"That's Houston's lip," he said. "Wait till I get my fingers on him! If he hasn't slipped us—it was the nearest thing."

"By the way, how's my friend, Coop?" I asked politely, setting to work on the food some one had brought.

Werner grinned. "Coop ought to interest you," he said. "Coop is a nut. I wouldn't lose Coop for a diamond fortune. Well, Coop's in hospital, doing well, thank you."

"I'm glad of that," I said. "He was a very entertaining type. Like you, I should feel his loss."

Werner was examining me without emotion, stolidly, almost lymphatically, and his jaws moved slowly on the food.

"There's just one question I'd like to put," he said at last. "Did you know anything of Raymond's lacquer box when you bought it?"

"I haven't any objection to answer that," I replied. "I hadn't the least knowledge of it."

"I thought so from the first." He nodded, and a scowl captured his face, till it was a mere mask of morose and malign fury. "Some day you and I will have a talk about your Mr. Houston. Meanwhile we've got something more important to talk of; and as there's no time to lose, better get on with your refreshment. An hour, you said? Yes, I'll give you the hour. Sit here and think. I don't quite know what's at the end of the hour, nor do you, I guess."

As he spoke, he rose like a quadrilateral figure, and waddled away grotesquely. Yet there was something impressive behind that grotesqueness; and, in spite of all the new ideas forming in my head, and the new recklessness of fate that I challenged, there was a strangely uneasy feeling in my heart.

CHAPTER X.

THE RIGHT BOWER.

For some reason, that night stands out vividly in my memory. I could not guess the hour nearer than midnight, though it may have been short of that by some time. I seemed to have lost count in the press of my strange adventures that evening.

It was a fine light night, as I think I have said. The camp lay in the trough of a valley which had been the ancient bed of a river, and was hemmed about with rising spurs naked as the Sahara, and round about these again, but at a greater distance, loomed the higher peaks of the Andes. The hollow in which we were was filled with cactus, and a shrubby growth of what sort I could not determine in the darkness. The play of the flames threw shadows over all—leaping shadows that blotted out the brushwood behind, and the tents near it.

From the time Werner came back and sat down with his face to the fire, I had a consciousness that I was playing a hand in a game. Of course I knew

what he wanted, but I didn't quite know yet how I felt about it. I had no passion of hatred for him, as I had for Houston, but I was in the position, if you consider, of one brought to bay by a pack of his natural enemies. That was how I regarded them. I did not know what I should say as I sat there with my back against a rock, and looked at Werner's broad, sardonic face. I was watching how he would play his hand.

"You know what I want, Poindexter," he said clearly. "I want Houston's trail."

"I supposed so," I replied. "I can't give it you."

"No, sonny, not just now, I know," he said easily. "I was prepared for that. But I've got to have it to-night, and so we'd better get along with our powwow. Any little natural reluctance or shyness about it you'll get over in time; only don't make it too long. Don't be too coy, Poindexter, or I'll have to take charge. What time did Houston reckon to reach—well, what he was aiming at?"

"If I remember rightly, he said we were two days off what you mean," I said deliberately.

"Ah! Then that leaves a small margin," said Werner sharply. "Is Gonzales there, Jeff? Tell him to get those mules ready."

His cool assumption that he would get what he wanted out of me ruffled me. Jeff, lean and hard-bitten, with his insignificant face, stood watching at the entrance to a tent. He smoked in a leisurely manner; it was obvious that he left the playing of this game to his leader with confidence. I suddenly determined what game it was. It was euchre. I don't know why I imaged it thus, but I did. Werner had opened and appeared to have taken his trick. I waited for him to go on.

"I'm going to make it easy for you," he said, in his assured way. "I don't mind using blank cartridge, if it will do. There's no need to make a mess. We've got room for you somewhere."

"You are very generous," I said sarcastically.

"I don't know," said Werner, looking at me, "that there's much of that about. It's only that I don't want more trouble than is needful. I believe in short cuts."

"Then cut it short," I advised.

"You have an arrangement with Houston," he proceeded. "You can transfer it to this shop if you like, subject to rebates."

"Will you explain?" I asked.

I was looking beyond him across the fire, which was leaping and obscuring the scrub near one of the tents. In that obscurity there seemed to be some movement; it seemed somehow pregnant with suggestion.

"We hold your party in an adverse position," went on Werner. "For one thing, we're on the trail of you, and for another, we've got you under lock and key. So we are in a position to make terms. As a short cut, I'm willing to let you in, but not on bedrock prices. You shall have your share. If you accept that, we call it a deal, and arrange details. I'd sooner do it without a mess."

"What mess?" I asked.

I saw a star behind a peak on the Andes, and the sky was as blue as the sea in contrast with those leaping flames. Still the shadows jumped grotesquely about the tent in the scrub; it drew my eyes with wonder, with foreboding.

"It's a question," said Werner, "of getting what I want. I'm going to get it to-night. You're a fool, sonny, if you don't come in on any terms. Don't you know what country we're in?"

The poor, pitiful figure of Cassilis fled before my eyes. I shuddered. "It is No Man's Land," I said. "There is no law in the wild, save the law of the wild."

"That's so," said Werner. "You can put two and two together, my lad. Don't you forget also that this was the land of the Inquisition. We're holding an inquisition on you, so to speak, this minute. This is Torquemada's land, and I guess Torquemada's instruments are not far off."

The shadows stirred across the scrub,

and Werner seemed to turn his head swiftly toward it and listen. The star was passing behind the white peak. I laughed.

There was no difference between them, Houston and Werner; they were murderous ruffians. They had no right in a respectable world. Let them perish! I had been playing my cards languidly, not caring, or, rather, only caring in so far as Werner's face and mind mattered. What had I to do with the treasure now? I had the thought of Houston going down before those other rascals, and I hugged it to myself as I made my answers. But now I laughed. This man threatened me with torture. Let him go on and see. I wanted to know exactly what kind of man would be let loose on Houston. I was anxious for him to prove himself savage, brutal. If he were demonstrably worse than Houston, I should rejoice. I laughed aloud.

"You are going to compel me to open my mouth?" I asked, with a sneer in my voice.

"That's it," said Werner bluffly. "You can take my terms, or you can be persuaded."

"Persuaded is an admirable euphemism," I said. "Well, I suppose we're all 'persuaders,' in a sense. We've been after what isn't ours."

"The Big Fish is his who finds it," said Werner.

"Well, it was found," said I.

"It was found by Raymond," he replied, "and he's dead. We've got the inheritance."

"It seems to me you haven't, but Houston has," I answered.

He uttered an oath. "Come, Poindexter, make your choice. We start before dawn."

"Are you quite sure that I shall speak?" I asked.

He gazed at me. "I reckon Jeff could make you speak," he said somberly, "or Gonzales. Personally, I don't take a hand at such things."

"Supposing I said I don't know?" I said.

"If you said you didn't know the trail, you'd lie," he said fiercely, "and we'd make you confess it."

I mused. "Well, I don't know it," I said, after a pause.

Werner struggled to his feet. "Gonzales!" he roared.

The smoke swayed to and fro, and the scrub disappeared and reappeared. A man of small stature came running up out of the darkness.

"Here's your job ready for you. Quick, man!" shouted Werner. He had risen, a menacing ogre, gnashing his teeth. I did not stir. I was newly aware of something seething in that shadow before the tent. Werner also grew aware of it. He ceased, stared, and his lips spread in a horrid grin.

"Wait a bit. I play the right bower," he said. "I'd forgotten."

Odd, wasn't it, that we had both been thinking of the same game?

"You can drop it, Gonzales. Step lively, Maddock!"

Werner was looking athwart the fire to the shadowed tent, and out of the gloom Maddock moved suddenly, lank and cadaverous, a specter with a whining voice. He dragged at something—some one.

"There's my card," said Werner harshly, agrin, his eyes full of meaning and menace.

It was Miss Varley.

I started and exclaimed; she said nothing, but looked across at me.

"In the round-up," Werner was saying, "she coralled both. It seems I am indebted to this lady doubly. Now then, Poindexter, speak up. It's up to you."

"What do you mean?" I asked, shaken to my heart.

Werner spat. "I don't know what's going to happen to Miss Varley. I guess it's up to you," he said. "You stand in a mighty funny relation to her, come to think of it—kind of god, or fate. Anyway, she's in your hands!"

"I beg, Mr. Poindexter, you will not consider me."

There was an aloofness in those cold words which chilled me. Did she understand? Had she understood? *Could* she understand? How much of

our talk had she heard in those obscuring shadows?

"We must make a beginning, and go on." Werner's voice it was. "You will remember how things happened in the Torquemada days. When we shall stop depends on you. So you see it's all in your hands."

"I can give you Raymond's secret," I said evenly, though my pulse beat like a watch, and there were voices and arguing in the chambers of my heart. "The treasure is to be sought in the temple of Astarnok."

Werner came across to me, and put his face close to mine, till his hot breath scared me. "If you're cheating me," he growled, and then: "All right, Maddock. It's off for the moment." He turned to me, and I saw Miss Varley fading into obscurity again. "You won't put me on the trail?"

"I have said I don't know it."

He mused. "Why?" he asked.

My old thought raced in my head, and I rejoiced in it. Houston and Werner! Why, the latter had proved himself beyond my dreams. I could trust him. If there were any one more satanic than Houston it was this black-avised, grinning devil. I had what I wanted. Unleash them and let them perish in mutual blood!

"Houston removed himself out of my purview some twelve hours since," I said deliberately. "He was, when I last saw him, endeavoring to assassinate me."

Werner uttered an oath which showed his interest. "Why didn't you tell me this before?" he demanded, and as I was silent, he went on suspiciously: "How do I know this isn't part of the lay? If it *is*——"

He turned again, and called to Jeff. "I reckon that hour's up, Poindexter," he said. "We'll fix you."

I shrugged my shoulders. I was quit of all sense of responsibility now. I had nothing to decide. I had decided.

I was imprisoned in a tent, with two half-breeds before it, and all the rest of the night there were sounds of preparations. It must have been about an hour before dawn, when the sky was lightening, that an uproar arose. There were shouts, and the noises of a concourse met, oaths, and the evidences of a quarrel. Suddenly the flap of the tent was pushed aside, and a black object barred the light.

"Are you there?" It was Werner's voice, and he followed the question with an oath. "Is this your doing?" he demanded.

"What?" I asked.

"The girl. You've got her." He threw a brand from the fire forward, and stared. "If it was you," he said, "I'd broil you."

I told him I didn't understand.

"She's gone," he said sullenly. "No, it wasn't you. It was—it must have been the devil."

He swung out of the tent, and I fell back in my prison, delighted, rejoicing, yet with an odd sense of disappointment. But there was no time left me for reflections, for immediately the Indians struck the tent, and began to pack up. Before dawn we were on the march.

I was kept rigidly under guard all that time in a scene of bustling activity, but I had no converse with any one until the moment of departure. Then I found myself under the special scrutiny of Gonzales, a slim, malicious-eyed fellow, with some aspirations to dandyism. He spoke English, more or less broken, and more or less dirty, and he gave his orders without ceremony. I was mounted on a mule like the rest of the company, and I trailed up the valley in their midst, a captive without any active desire to be anything else. I was now on the road to the final act of the drama, and I was gleefully anxious to witness it. I did not know then how many scenes that act would contain ere the curtain fell for good.

I got no information out of Gonzales, who was surly, and smoked and cursed his mule. But a little later Werner joined us. He had lost his mood of ferocity, and was amiable enough, even talkative.

"The girl didn't matter, after all," he told me, "though I'd give something to learn how she managed to get away."

"The girl didn't matter, as you say. You've got me," I answered him.

"Oh, we're holding you, all right, for extra safety." He grinned. "I don't say I don't believe your tale, but I'm taking no risks, and Torquemada's there all the time, anyway."

"I am content," I said. "Let's get on. I suppose you know the place."

He regarded me curiously, as if he did not understand. Indeed, there was every reason why he shouldn't. "Astarnok, or, as they soften it in Spanish, Astarno, is a sort of historic site hereabouts," he said. "Some of my men know it; I've heard of it myself. There was once a Chimu city there."

"Chimu!" I echoed.

"Yes," he said, "the civilization before the Incas. They say the Chimus go back as far as ten thousand years. They were wiped out or amalgamated by the Inca bunch." He was evidently without interest in the Chimus, for he abandoned the subject.

"You seem to be in a hurry," he continued, "I suppose you're figuring that you've got a hand in this job. But you'll recollect you refused. It was on the alternative you surrendered. You haven't got a fraction of a share in the Big Fish, sonny."

"My good man," said I calmly, "do you suppose that if I had agreed to your terms I would credit you with the folly of keeping faith? I have quite another opinion of you—I rank you as too high a scoundrel for that. I'm not worrying about the Big Fish."

He frowned, but I don't believe he minded my frankness.

"What the devil are you at, then?" he asked bluntly.

"It seems to me," said I, "that you go one better than Houston. Judging, at any rate, from your references and menaces last night, I put you higher in the ranks of crime. That's what I wanted to find out; that's what has given me such satisfaction. For now I have let you loose on Houston, I'm sure of getting what *I* want."

"What do you want?" he asked sharply.

"Houston, living or dead!"

His eyes searched me. "Oh!" he said at last. "So Houston's been selling you, too, eh? Houston would sell his mother. And he's slimy, too; he'd escape the penalty. By thunder, I've a notion Houston will be missing at the last trump. But you're wrong," he added. "I'd have kept faith. That's the difference between Houston and me. I dare say I'm worse than he in some ways. I'm no judge, but I guess I keep faith. He's a Judas. How has he let you out?"

"He sent me over a crumbling cliff when he'd finished with me," I explained.

"Ah!" Werner was obviously interested. "That was when you and the girl were on the hill 'way back. That was it, was it? I was wondering——"

"You saw me there?" I asked.

He nodded. "Spotted you both. We kept tabs on the girl. It puzzled me. I reckon she changed her mind. Women are like that. Anyway, she served us pretty well."

"Did you follow me?" I asked.

"Yes, but Maddock played the fool, and lost your trail. However, we picked up the girl to go along with. She came in useful. I thought she might. She kept tabs on you, I reckon."

I began to see that there was a certain system in this gentleman's conduct. "The Indian?" I asked. "What became of him?"

"Indian?" he queried indifferently. "Oh, with the girl? He lit out, as they all do. I know the breed hereabouts."

Yet I could have sworn that Manuel was no Cholo, nor any Indian of those parts. I began to see something else, and that was perhaps an explanation of Miss Varley's escape.

"So Houston signed your death certificate, did he?" went on Werner. "Yes, he's equal to all that. It's like him to muddle it, also. He don't do jobs clean."

"I hope you do, and will," I said fiercely.

"I guess so," he answered quite mildly. "I don't fancy Houston will get through my fingers. He did once—and he's got to pay for it."

"Will you tell me who Houston is?" I asked bluntly.

"He's a Judas; he sold us," said Werner.

"You mean he belonged to your gang?" I asked, perplexed.

"That's so. He sold us. It don't amount to a bad tale, taking it all round. Houston's foxy, but he's overreached himself."

"But he and Raymond were partners in the expedition for the Big Fish," I protested.

Werner laughed. "That was the stuffing he used, eh?" he said. "Raymond wouldn't have had him within a score of miles if he could have helped it. It was Houston he bolted from, Houston and me."

There was no shame, no complacency in his statement; it was merely a statement, and that was all.

"I'm interested," I said. "Would you mind telling me more?"

"Not at all," said Werner. "We've both been sold, and we've got to make good on Houston."

"I'm glad you are what you are," I said. "I have another reason, a far stronger reason." He looked at me interrogatively. "I had a friend——"

"Ah!" His exclamation was accompanied by a flash of the eye. "Yes, there was another. Of course, we knew there were three of you. I was speculating about the third man; so that's it. You said you 'had' a friend. I take it Houston succeeded better with him, then."

I nodded. I dared not speak.

"I don't believe I need really keep tabs on you," said Werner thoughtfully. "I kinder fancy you'd make a good pardner. This Houston is false all through. Look, Poindexter," and animation for the first time was in his heavy voice, "we were in a country like this 'way back, and we'd prospected ourselves gaunt and naked, all five of us. We had lived, of course, on the usual canned stuff, and even that petered out. The rations played havoc with us. We tried experiments with the grass, but they weren't a success. It was blazing hot in the day, and at night—oh, well, you had some, and can guess pretty well what it was.

"We were sick, dog-sick of it all, and were on the home trail, as tired men as you'd want to see; and one evening, just as we got the camp fixed for the night, there tumbled in out of nowhere this Raymond, sicker and tireder than we were. He fell at the tent flap, and we gave him a nip of spirit to fetch him round. But he was mighty sick, and couldn't keep anything on his stomach for days.

"We couldn't leave him there, and so we fixed up a litter, and managed to carry him on the mules, but it must have jolted his inside, poor devil. It wasn't exactly flat racing there. Then he recovered a little, and was wonderfully mild. The don had good manners and style. He vowed he was profoundly grateful to us, and hated to be a burden, and all the rest of it. And I believe," said Werner, laughing, "it would have all gone at that if he hadn't put his hand in his pocket and pulled out a handful of coins and things. Lord love us, there was no mistaking them; their appearance and age and everything about them was witness what they were. They were treasure from a cache!

"I stared at them, and Houston got on to it, also, but the others didn't—not then. He wanted to make it up to us for our hospitality, he said. There was the value of a few thousand dollars in the jewels in his fist, and as he offered, I for one was not going to be foolish enough to refuse. But here Houston came in. He shot me a look, and put up a hand.

"'Mr. Raymond, I reckon you're our guest,' he said. 'We don't make a profit out of sick men.'

"That was Houston. That's where he came in always. If he'd played straight—well, it's no good going over that. Anyway, Houston stopped me, and we had a talk that night. Raymond was full of gratitude, choked with it. He said our conduct was handsome, and he became friendly. Houston, mind you, hadn't got any further idea than a cache somewhere. That was

plain enough, but he wanted to know more. So did I after our talk.

"Raymond became friendly, and babbled. He'd always taken an interest, he told us, in the Incas and in the Spanish South American provinces, and he'd formed theories. It was one night when we were nearing civilization that he spoke up, letting us into his secret. Of course, we had all of us heard rumors of the Big Fish. Who hasn't in Peru? Anyway, the name came up in his talk, and Houston's elbow dug into my ribs. His teeth gleamed.

"'The Big Fish!' said he, leaning back, but wary as a hawk. 'If a man should hook that, he'd have to get a net to land it, I reckon.'

"Raymond gave him a glance, for he, too, was as sharp as scissors, and shut up. 'I should say you were right,' he answered; and never a word more passed his lips on the subject.

"Well, you'll think that was a poor scent to follow on, but it wasn't. Here was a man talking of the Big Fish, and possessed of Inca gold and gems. Anyway, it was good enough to call the view halloo. Raymond stuck to him like a leech. It was understood we were all in it. Raymond was leading, because he was reckoned the first-class intellect among us, but we were all in it. To make a long story short, he smelt a rat. You see, he hadn't taken the cache on his back, and so it meant an expedition, if he'd found anything. Houston watched him like a cat, and he overdid it. The old don got wind of us. He was in Lima at the time, and had been making preparations. That was what made Houston give himself and us away. He took alarm, and stopped, stayed in his hole a bit, and then bolted.

"He slipped us to Europe. Houston packed after him next steamer, and we followed, and after a while we ran him down in London."

Werner pursed his lips. "We reckoned some of that Big Fish belonged to us. If it hadn't been for us, he'd have been a corpse. He owed us a share, and if he didn't see it, we were going to help ourselves. That was how it was. We settled down to watch again, and it was mighty slow work. The man made never a move. Perhaps he was afraid he was being watched. Anyway, he squatted down in some London district—Bloomsbury, is it?—and lived quietly, and without a sign. At last we got tired of it, and we tried inside work. Raymond hired the upper part of a house which a retired butler rented, who was his landlord. We got him for a consideration, and we got admittance to the place. Maddock had a try, and then Jeff; finally it was Houston's turn, but we couldn't find a scrap of anything to throw light upon the Big Fish.

"Just then Raymond got sick, and that blocked our operations. So we sat and sucked our fingers, and swore in London town like four fools. Then I tried my hand along with the butler, and the old boy smelt a rat again. He got nervous and peevish, the man said. He went out one morning hastily, and when he came back he'd a parcel in his hand. Mullins managed to see it afterward. It was a lacquer box.

"I don't know if he suspected Mullins, but it had the look of it. 'Mullins,' said he, after a cab had been called that afternoon, 'I believe there were burglars in my rooms last night. Anyway, as I've only got one valuable possession, if it's that they're after, they'll have to burgle the National Safe Deposit,' and he departed with his parcel.

"That's where the lacquer box came in, and that sold us. There were two boxes, as it turned out, but Mullins only saw one; and that's how we came to make the mistake—unless it was a chance of the auction room."

"Your story is amazingly interesting," I said. "I am obliged to you, Werner. We have now reached the point where I come in."

"You've hit it, sonny. You come in precisely there, and, but for you, we should have probably had the Big Fish by now."

"But for me," I corrected, "the secret of the Big Fish would have been lost forever. It would have drifted out of that auction room blown on the winds of chance, a meaningless phrase. And I sincerely wish it had!"

But Werner was paying no heed. He hadn't finished; he was absorbed. "By thunder!" he said tensely, "to think that Houston played that trick on me!"

I became aware that the story was not finished. "What trick?" I asked.

"We made our shot in the auction room, as you know," said Werner, "and got the wrong box. I guess afterward you smoked something, and clung on to yours as a sporting chance. But Houston got onto you. He was angry at what he called the way we mussed it up. He started out himself, missed it by a shave in your flat, and missed it by a bigger price in the bungalow."

Werner reined in his mule, and looked blindly at the rocks. "That's the kind of a grafter Houston is! He threw us over, and made terms with you. Not a word did he let us know, but kept close and mum, and promised this and that, and said it could be left in his hands, but we had a doubt of him, and watched. You see, I knew the skunk. It grew plain he'd sold us. He was scared that time in London. Then Jeff used his knife——"

"Ah!" I said. "Now I understand."

"He was a fool to do that. That can come later. It nearly put us off guard. It was only the last moment that we got Coop aboard. I picked him up cheap in a London tavern, game for anything. He's a pretty agent, is Coop. Well, anyway, we managed it, and now we're hot on the trail."

He wiped his brow, lit a cigar, and laughed grimly as he puffed out the smoke.

"If there's anywhere this trail leads to for Houston, it's not paradise," he added.

Jeff was shouting some distance ahead up the valley, and his long arms went out as if pointing. Werner left me, and pushed on his mule, picking its way with remarkable celerity among the scrub and bowlders. The Indians and half-breeds, of which latter there were several in the train, brought the rest of the cavalcade to a standstill, and awaited orders. They lit cigarettes without visible excitement, and stood beside smoking flanks. The sun was streaming down on us, and the white peaks mocked our burned faces. Presently the train was in motion again. Werner dropped back slowly until Gonzales and I overtook him.

"Houston, living or dead, you wanted, wasn't it?" he asked grimly. "Well, you can have him—I don't know in which state myself yet. It means the same in the end."

CHAPTER XI.

THE TWO CAMPS.

I knew then that we were at near quarters, and I asked Werner.

"Astarnok's across the ridge," he said, "and friend Houston's there. I'll chaw him up in ten minutes," he added, with savage vehemence; and later asked: "Isn't there a play or something I saw way back in New York about 'something lingering with boiling oil in it'? Curse the fellow! To think he'd dare do me like this!"

His face was scarlet, and his eyes bulged, as if he were going to have a stroke, but he seemed to master himself, and returned to his conversation. He was by no means of that sinister nervous organization I had detected in Houston. Here was rank brute force and rank brute passion, but now in intellectual control.

"Expedition after expedition has tried for the Fish, Poindexter," he said, with a queer note of triumph ringing in his voice, as though already he had his hands on the treasure, "and every one has failed. They found the Little Fish a hundred and fifty years ago, and a tidy nest egg it was. But the Big Fish—there's something in it to stir the imagination, that age-long search, eh? It's picturesque, and would turn into a sort of romance. The last lot out perished of starvation and cold out on the ranges. How Raymond struck it is a puzzle. He was interested in the Indians. I reckon he made out somehow through his knowledge of them. They don't know anything. I don't think they would take gold if you offered it them. They don't understand it. They

take dollars, all right. They're full of traditions and superstitions. Raymond knew the lingo. I fancy that was how he got hold of his secret, mooning about among them. And it was worth it, Poindexter!"

"Your narrative has been entertaining and certainly instructive," I said. "But there's a flaw in it so far as I am concerned."

"How's that?" said he. "Have you played me false?" His eye rolled in black menace.

"No," I said. "You have all I know. As I have hinted, I think I prefer you to Houston, probably because you're an unknown quantity, and Houston isn't. No; it's something in your narrative that puzzles me."

"I'll answer any questions," he said cheerfully. "I don't mind tabling my hand now. What you could do, my lad, even if you wanted to, don't amount to shucks now."

"I've told you I want Houston's head on a charger," I said icily. "But I have a weakness for a rational narrative, and I should like to ask how you discovered that the lacquer box would be sold at the auction rooms."

"The merest detail, my friend, the merest detail," said Werner, with his eyes alert on some object in the distance. It had no significance, however, and he came back to me. "Mullins, lad, Mullins, a man with all the traditional qualifications for butler, including silence and craft—Mullins also is now waiting in London town to buy a little place in Cheshire with his ill-gotten gains." He laughed. "Funny notion, some of your English townsfolk have. Mullins' ideal was simple. 'A little place with a bit of fishin' and a little 'untin', Mr. Werner,' says he. Mullins had the name of Raymond's solicitors, and we had nothing to do but watch."

He paused, and went on meditatively: "Raymond died two days later; I reckon he had no time to give instructions about his box and his secret. Anyway, the lawyers had no inkling of it, for Houston called on them—one of his bits of bluff and cheek that got him through sometimes. However, he didn't make much out of it. Takes a pretty deal to make much out of a lawyer. Everything was sold in the usual way, to wind up the estate."

"The estate!" I echoed thoughtfully. "Who was——"

But a signal was flashed on the knoll ahead for Werner, and he left me. For the moment our progress was checked, and it was checked by design. One of the Indians had kept us in touch with Houston's column, and it was now reported that he was moving down the valley beyond the rocky walls of our cañon. This puzzled Werner, who had heard from one of the Indians familiar with these parts that Astarnok lay farther up on the heights, the grizzled and dreary ruin of a past civilization.

"He don't know he's followed. He's got a surprise," was Werner's conclusion, with grim satisfaction.

That he took things so easily somewhat astonished me, now that we were within hearing, so to speak, of the clash of arms; but he was imperturbable as the action approached, pulled forth a long cigar, proffered me one, and smoked, as he watched the operations of his camp.

"It don't matter a cuss word what Houston does now," he asserted genially. "I've got him. He can't get away from me, and we can take our own time. What he knows I've got to know. What he finds is mine. We've got all the fun coming."

I am bound to confess that it was not possible for me to take the situation with the same nonchalance. I burned to be at Houston, to sacrifice him, to see him in ashes. You may say this was a vindictive and uncharitable spirit. I am only stating the facts of my emotions—the emotions, remember, of one who had seen his friend done barbarously to death.

It was as night closed in that we came to our rest in a little sequestered gulch above the ruins of Astarnok. The idea of that ruined sanctuary fascinated me by its exceeding remoteness in the bounds of the world. Werner

was undisturbed. What he knew was that three miles down the valley was Houston's camp, and that Houston was all unaware of our anticipation of him. This tickled Werner, and he made merry at supper with his unholy and unseemly crew.

I did not know which of the ugly gang I disliked most—the mean Maddock, the repellent Miguel, or that little, ratlike Jeff, who had been responsible for the knife wound in Houston's body. They were to me a gang of pirates, and nothing more; and I had no part nor lot with them. On Werner's own barefaced showing, they had all been in a dirty conspiracy to rob an unfortunate old man of the legitimate rewards of his "find."

That reflection gave me instant pause, however. What was I? What had Cassilis and I been? I was afraid to face the exact logic of our status. The "find" had been Raymond's, and we had taken part in robbing his executors of its proceeds! No; I could not admit all that. The estate, whatever that stood for, was not in possession of the Big Fish, and never had been. Surely it was reserved for the bold spirits of an adventurous expedition. Houston, then? Or these unscrupulous brigands? I gave up the puzzle. Anyway, I had no longer any relation to the treasure. I was there for another purpose, and if so be Werner and his thieves should assist me to that vengeance, no, to that justice, which my heart craved, I was content. I listened to Werner, smoked, and looked down on the broken stone walls fading into darkness. I could at least share Werner's grim satisfaction in Houston's ignorance of the fate that awaited him.

Werner, as I say, was in excellent spirits, and indulged his prisoner. He invited me to go down with him to the ruins which stood in a grass-grown space between ledges of bowlders. Somehow I had expected to find more of a building than this scattered heap of rocks. It had been once of massive design, as it was possible to determine from the site and the size of the stones, but with the passing of many centuries had become merely a graveyard.

To add to this impression, it was set in a plan of mounds, as it were the tumuli of the dead Incas. Yet, I remembered that this was reputed to be of earlier origin than the Incas. Who were these ancient and forgotten Chimus, whose civilization had gone into the dust these thousands of years, but who practiced arts and sciences in the era of the early Egyptian dynasties? Was this indeed one of their temples to unknown gods?

Werner's slow voice broke in on these speculations: "That priest of yours doesn't worship much here, I guess."

The priest of Raymond's message I had always taken as an adjunct to the "temple," but now my mind, long adrift from such considerations, faced the idea. There would and could be no priest in this place. I said as much to Werner.

"That's not Houston's idea," he said, looking down the valley in the twilight. "Man, you're not fit for a rough-house tackle of this sort," he added, laughing. "I'm laying for Houston, and he don't know it." He guffawed. "But he's doing my business down the valley."

"I don't understand," I said. "I don't want, as a matter of fact, to understand unless it bears on——"

"The head on a charger. I take your point," he interrupted. "Most people I know wouldn't have sized you up, Poindexter. That tale wouldn't have held water. But I know a bit more. You can go ahead, anyway; and I'll tell you. Down below there is an Indian village, and that's why Houston's pitched there. He's smart. He smelled the priest in the village, and he's going to find him and hobble him."

"And you?" I asked, astonished at his coolness again.

"Watch me bump Houston!" He snapped his fingers contemptuously. "It only adds to the picturesqueness that he should be doing my work down there."

He moved away to go upward to the camp, but I did not respond.

"All right, sonny," he said, with his

rich laugh. "I've told you to go ahead. I've squeezed you dry, and you can vamose."

The darkness swallowed him. I had my contemptuous liberty. I breathed free of the air, and, after the sound of his feet had gone, I walked round the starlit ruins, inspecting, pondering.

The red fury against Houston was growing within me. I looked down, as Werner had done, and thought I could see the fires of his camp. Swiftly, on an impulse which was almost that of an enraged animal, I wheeled round, and began to clatter down the rocky way toward the lower parts of the gorge.

As I progressed, I found the natural phenomena grow more gracious. The stony valley merged into an ample stretch of valley, clothed with grass and shrub, from which the environing hills retired. It was evidently one of the oases of that mountain wilderness which we had reached. As I drew near the camp fires of Houston's party, I was conscious of another than myself, and I drew into shadows in the fear that I might be seen and recognized by one of that unscrupulous company.

No sooner had I done so than the figure I had seen slouched past me, and I seemed to recognize it as one of Werner's party. It was thus, then, that he kept watch, while his enemy and mine slumbered all unawares in the apparent security of his camp.

I turned my steps farther down, and circumvented the camp, and then I became aware of another shadow. It was Houston!

If I had been armed I could have shot him in his tracks. I followed with a deepening malice at an even distance, keeping him before me in the starlight. He picked his way downward, as though familiar with it, and presently came out upon a flat where a mountain torrent roared, and where the uncertain light showed the outlines of several buildings. I guessed that this must be a native village in those wilds, and I began to have an inkling of what Houston wanted. He entered one of the huts, and disappeared from my view; and I sat without in the cold, clear night awaiting him.

It must have been quite an hour ere he appeared again, and he went upward, as if he had finished his errand. I pursued him.

We had not gone more than a few hundred yards in this way, and were come to the bed of a stream, when of a sudden he saw me. I had become careless through security, and, moreover, I had not reckoned on the silhouette which my figure would present against the empty sky. He turned, saw me, and ran forward toward me, crying out something in an unknown tongue. Unarmed as I was, I fled with all the speed of my feet into the brushwood, and scrambled up the side of the hill. A stone detached by my ascent acquainted him with the direction I had taken, and I heard the bushes part as he crept toward me. As noiselessly as I could I moved sideways along the declivity, from bush to bush, taking care to disturb no more stones. At this moment I had only room for one congratulatory thought, that he had not known me for what I was, but had supposed me one of the Indians.

The stars gave me a certain light for guidance, and I was not now afraid of being overtaken. It was unlikely that Houston would pursue a mere inquisitive Indian very far. That I was right in my conjecture was demonstrated by the silence which soon fell upon the scrub. I waited for a time before resuming my way, and when I did I moved forward rapidly uphill in the direction in which I calculated that the ruins of Astarnok lay. But a score of little tributary gorges contributed to the volume of the greater valley, and I soon came to the conclusion that I was ascending the wrong ravine. With a mental review of the topography, I made out that I must cross the spur on my right to reach the valley I wanted. When I had surmounted the ridge, I was pleased to think my conjecture had been right, for away southward, but weakly conspicuous as a star, was a spot of light which I assumed was Werner's camp fire.

I crossed the ravine slanting upward, but after I had been walking for an hour I was forced to the conclusion that I had been mistaken. The light glowed still in the distance, but seemingly as remote as ever. I stared, wondering. It was higher up, between two peaks of the Sierras, and burned white and still. Could it possibly be a star? I asked myself; and into my head there flashed the thought of Cassilis. I could not say why I associated him with it. It was preposterous. Yet he was so constantly in my thoughts that it did not seem strange. I had the curious fancy that the light was drawing me onward, and that it would guide me to Cassilis, seated by his fire, hailing me with his cheerful, well-remembered voice, "Hello, Jack!" Cassilis, whose maimed and broken body I had seen go over the precipice in the mountain torrent.

At the head of the valley I came to a pause. The cold of the night blown from the snow-clad Cordillera was intense, but I was warm from my exercise. I did not know how long I had been wandering, but I judged that the night was far spent. After a rest, I made my way along the moraine which joined up these lesser gorges under the shadow of the greater peaks, and so descended one which I thought I recognized as that which held our camp. I proved mistaken once more, however, and so the dawn was near at hand before I actually reached the ruins of the Chimu temple.

As I approached, worn out now with my nocturnal travels, I saw a figure moving solitary in front of me, a figure lean and tall, with the walk of an Indian, and, supposing it to be one of Werner's men, I was on the point of hailing it. Then I refrained, for I remembered that Houston's camp was not far, and that this might be a spy from below. But the man appeared to make no attempts to hide; he went straight forward upon his way through scrub and rock, until he disappeared within the ruins of the temple. I followed with caution, and found myself behind a broken wall of stones.

The Indian was visible now in the center of the temple, and was motionless there, as if he had been a statue. I gazed for several minutes, and he did not move, and the sky grew perceptibly lighter. I could see him quite plainly, standing in the middle of the tumuli, and I could even make out his features. What struck me now was the strange headdress he wore, which seemed to go down upon his back for some distance.

The light grew, and then, just as I was wearying of my position and my curiosity, the man stooped, went upon his knees, and bowed his head to the earth, remaining there for some minutes. I watched in silence, and then suddenly a light away across the shoulder of the Sierra drew my eyes. I turned, and there was the dawn. With a flash I knew. The Indian had been making his obeisance to the sun. Here was one of the ancient sun worshipers.

CHAPTER XII.

THE RUINS AT ASTARNOK.

Houston came up the valley about ten o'clock that morning. I was roused from a deep sleep by Werner, and saw his grim features set in a grin before me.

"Like to see the fun?" he inquired.

When I had grasped the situation, I scrambled to my feet, and, while I made my preparations, learned that Werner's spies had brought him word of Houston's movements.

"Where did you get to last night?" he asked, regarding me quizzically. "Lucky you hadn't a pistol, eh?"

I stared, and then I began to understand. Werner's spies had knowledge of more than I had suspected; they must have been on Houston's track when he visited the Indian village, and on mine also.

It seemed that Werner had a dramatic surprise in contemplation, for he took no one with him but me, and he waited behind a portion of the temple ruins in a mood of anticipatory gusto. I must say that the first sight of Houston by day thrilled me; I could under-

stand now those primitive instincts of hate, revenge, and blind passion which lie at the roots of poor human nature. Werner had said it was lucky that I had no gun, and I wondered at the adjective. When Houston entered through a breach in the stonework, debonair, watchful, and resolute, I felt that I moved. Werner's hand was upon my arm the next moment, and it was like a band of iron in its grip. My glance swept him with its angry survey, and I saw his face massive, set, stolid, yet with some bubbling undercurrent in it. He suggested some one waiting until the quarry was within striking reach.

Houston inspected the temple, and made a circuit of it within the broken walls. The tumuli all about drew his eyes, and in his preoccupation he came toward us, his light eyes ambushed and flickering, yet giving a certain inhuman air to him. It was at this moment that Werner chose to spring his surprise.

"Say, Houston!"

The man looked up, across at Werner where he had shown himself beyond the stonework, and, though this must have been an amazing encounter for him, he did not change face. Werner, I am sure, would, in such a case, have displayed some emotion, if only that of anger and ferocity. But Houston stared, and then showed his white teeth above his beard in a smile.

"That you, Werner? This is luck!" he said easily.

"I'm glad you find it so," said Werner heavily, and here I came into view.

Now, in Houston's eyes I was dead and done for, but his smile wavered only for a moment, and was caught up again and went on as his eyes met mine.

"You, too, Poindexter!" he said. "This is more interesting than ever."

He could not, however, keep something out of his throat, something that cracked. He must have guessed at the explanation of Werner's presence, and he must have known that the secret was no longer his alone.

"I'm glad to see you about," went on Werner, seating his square body on the wall. "It's saved us a trip, maybe, down to your camp." He tossed forward loosely a hand which held a revolver. "There are many ways of settling with you, Houston, and I've not made up my mind yet. After all, it might save trouble if I were to shoot you out of hand now, though I'll admit I've thought of other things when I was kind of lonesome and needed cheering."

Houston looked at his nails—a trick I remembered.

"You are at liberty to act as you decide," he said easily. "But I don't fancy you'll go in for melodrama, at least not yet."

"The court is always anxious to listen to anything the condemned prisoner may have to say in his defense," said Werner, who was enjoying himself. "Go ahead, Houston. Any mitigating circumstances? Any orphan children?"

He leaned to me, and added: "For your private delectation, Poindexter, I may remark that Houston is the man who killed his father and mother, and then appealed to the judge for mercy on the ground that he was a poor orphan."

Werner grinned at his own wit, and with the weapon in extreme evidence eyed his victim.

"The wilderness tells no tales, Houston," he said, "and Poindexter won't, I guess. He's after you himself."

"What you say about the wilderness strikes me," said Houston, faintly smiling. "It hides all; it's difficult to find anything in the wilderness, anyway, and more specially if one takes the trouble to conceal it."

"Cassilis——" I strove to say, and said, and the word was a snarl on my lips. I could utter no more. I choked.

Houston's glance was penetrative, swiftly precautionary; it summed up my unarmed state.

"You see, Werner, you can't afford to lose me," he said softly, "for I hold the priest."

"The priest!" Werner was clearly taken aback, and his face got ugly.

"You are doubtless familiar, through our mutual friend there, with the fact that the priest here has the secret of the

Big Fish. Well, the priest's in my keeping."

As the man's cool face, expressing no triumph, was presented to us, I wondered how far he spoke the truth, this unscrupulous liar!

There was something savage, something primeval in the ferocity of Werner's face as he made reply:

"Anyway, I hold you, and you're not likely to forget it."

"Then, my dear fellow, we're all satisfied," said Houston lightly.

He began to hum an air, and proceeded with his investigations, Werner eying him with the meditation and potential fury of a bull waiting to charge. I don't think he had looked for this; he had expected triumph all along the line, and he did not like the counter. Yet Houston had placed him in a predicament, if what he said was true. Werner could do nothing without the priest, and he was aware of it. The situation was rendered more bitter by the fact that he could not be sure if Houston were lying. So the scoundrel held him in a cleft stick, whether he held the priest or not.

Houston strolled off presently when his inspection was over, and Werner with an oath returned to his camp. That he was in a black temper was demonstrated by his attitude to his men. Ruffians and desperadoes as I had reason to believe these, they were evidently cowed by a superior force such as was constituted in Werner. He gave orders which sent half a dozen men scurrying about, including his partners. Meanwhile a notion had dawned upon me.

Werner's plans embraced a ransacking of the Indian village. One of his Indians spoke the lingo of those tribes, and he was utilized as the chief inquisitor.

The Indians, who differed somewhat in physiognomy from the Cholos, to whom I had grown accustomed, were a quiet, peaceable folk living on the borders of starvation.

There were llamas and other animals down the valleys, and the Indians cultivated coffee and corn, remaining self-sufficing in their primitive isolation. They were amenable to the overtures of Werner's spokesman, but showed no friendliness. Indeed, it was possible to detect in their attitude at times a reticence, a shyness, and a distrust. White folk came their way but rarely, and in general these must have been rude prospectors and pioneers without consideration for the indigenous inhabitants of those inhospitable regions.

I had by chance the opportunity of examining one, an intelligent fellow of some authority, for I was present when he was interrogated, and I added my questions through the interpreter. The stereotyped question had met with the one answer.

"Where is the priest?"

"There is no priest. There is the chief, Ingres."

"Where, then, is Ingres?"

A look of suspicion passed over the troubled face.

"He is gone."

That had been the invariable answer, while Werner's face grew blacker.

"Where is he gone?"

The man knew nothing. Ingres had gone on the previous night, and had never returned. No one knew where he was. Then came my question, which arose out of the notion I had taken, as I have told you.

"Ask him what time the man disappeared. Was it at night?"

The interpreter obtained assent.

"At what hour?"

The priest, a chief, it appeared, had left his house after midnight, and had never returned.

"Ask him which house is the priest's?"

"Oh, fudge, Poindexter, we know all that, and that Houston interviewed the man last night," interrupted Werner impatiently.

Well, it was no business of mine if he failed to find the priest; only Houston interested me. So I said nothing of what I had seen that dawn, of the impassive Indian waiting in the precincts of the temple, of the bowed head of the sun worshiper. The priest, Ingres, had

been at liberty then, I could swear. It was just possible that he had fallen into Houston's hands since, but I doubted it.

Werner also was in doubt, though he knew nothing of the visitant. I don't think he believed Houston, or, at any rate, he remained in a condition of mental suspense. He operated on the supposition that Houston might be telling the truth. Yet if he had been convinced of this, I am sure that the man would have recalled the methods of Torquemada, of which he had grimly reminded me. He said nothing to me, but I came to the conclusion that he had decided to let Houston think he was believed, and to keep watch. If the priest was at large, having taken alarm, or, for any other reason, hiding himself, it would be better to have an extra pair of eyes to search with, and in any case Werner could reflect that Houston could do nothing without his knowledge. So it came about that, while engaged in waiting on events, Werner turned his attention to the tumuli about the temple.

He began to excavate, I don't know with what hope or expectations; it might have been merely to mark time. But at least he had an interested spectator, which was myself. Somehow this relic of a long-perished civilization seized on my imagination, even, if I may put it so, on my pity. It seemed so far away, so distant and alien from the modern way of men. It was a place of sepulture, as was soon evident; and, grave by grave, the remains of that lost race came easily to the light. They came in the form of shards and vessels, offering strange evidence to the high artistic tastes of the vanished Chimus who had sunk, perchance, beneath the onslaughts of their successors, the Incas. Yet truly the Incas were in a less civilized condition, and nearer barbarism.

Ten thousand years might have lapsed since these pots and vessels were buried in the sepulchers of their former owners. As I watched them dug up, I was awed. The pottery was in various colors, and elaborately painted and modeled. No trace of lettering, however, appeared on the pieces. The most were in the form of water vessels with hollow handles. Some were purely painted vessels, others were grotesques in bas relief. The Chimu heads modeled on this pottery were of a bold Coptic cast, and seemed to claim kinship with those early Egyptians whose dynasties were probably contemporaneous with the prime of Chimu civilization.

All these uncovered treasures would have been dear to the eager heart of the antiquarian, but to Werner and his kind they were as the broken bottles of a picnic party. He was after treasure of another sort, and grimly resolved on getting it.

Between the two camps brooded an atmosphere that one felt was ominous; it was that of the close calm preceding the thunderstorm. I am bound to say that Houston exhibited no sign of disturbance. He was as courteous in his behavior as heretofore, a polished scoundrel with blackness in his ugly heart.

And I, too, remained in a condition of neutrality, brooded over also by a somber emotion, until that happened which I am now to relate.

You will recall that I had my suspicions, that I had formed a theory, and that I held my tongue. What part or lot had I in the quarrels and affairs of these ruffians that I should assist either with my advice? Because I wanted vengeance on Houston was no reason for helping Werner to the treasure, unless by these means alone I could exact what I wanted. So thinking I knew more than either, I was silent, and watched.

On the third night I rambled on the Sierra again, crossed a valley of rocks, and was brought up by the gleam of a distant light. It shone like that flame I had noticed before, and hailed me like a beacon. That speck of light invited me, drew me. I set out to find it.

The night was sharp, with still cold, and was rich with a plenitude of fine stars. If I have been able to suggest to you anything of the nature of that

country, you will picture the road over which I went, stumbling and blind to the plain sense of my position. What sort of fool was I, in pursuit of this phantom, this will o' the wisp? Ah, well, deep down in my unplumbed heart, hardly recognized or acknowledged, but living still, was hope. If I was alive for anything, I was alive then for justice, and yet not for justice, but for vengeance, which is God's. Cassilis was always in my thoughts, a dear companion, a trusted friend, a helpless victim. That flicker of light represented to me something which I could not have interpreted at the time. In that unmerciful wilderness, it heralded hope and yielded comfort. I stumbled on toward it.

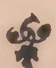
I do not know how long it took me to surmount the shoulder of the mountain whence I imagined the light to issue. It may have been several hours. And, to my cold, blank despair, when I reached the summit, there was nothing—no light, no appearance or semblance of any. I stood wondering and meditating. Tired as I was, I had been sustained by a thought. Now I began to feel lassitude steal through my limbs. I had followed a mirage. What I had taken to be a beacon of welcome and consolation had turned out to be darkness. There was a supreme silence about the peak which I had climbed. Stars filled heaven, as I have said, and blinked at me solemnly. It seemed a mockery. It was not for that pale, uncomforting light that I had struggled so far.

I could have shaken my fist at the blank sky. I was ill—I was burning now with a fever, and I dimly recognized it, without minding. And at last I did raise my arms, and waved them in defiance. I shouted my passionate protest to the stars. And then I was aware of something that stole out and moved upon me, and I turned, and I knew it was a woman.

It was then that I fell, fell toward her, not knowing what I said, but calling on her and seizing her hands, and kissing them, and kissing the skirt against which my head rested ere it reached the earth.

TO BE CONTINUED.

This story will be continued in the December Month-end POPULAR, on sale two weeks hence, November 25th.



A BRACE OF DEAD ONES

IN Washington a senator or representative who has failed of reëlection, but makes it a habit to hang around the national capital as a private citizen, is known as a "dead duck." In this class is Nathan B. Scott, who was at one time senator from West Virginia.

One night, when everybody who owned an automobile was driving in Potomac Park, the crowd noticed that an electric runabout, with all its lights out, was being laboriously shoved along the edge of the driveway. In it were a woman and a child. A second glance showed that the person doing the shoving was former Senator Scott. He was short of breath and red of face, absorbed in his attempt to push the machine to a location which would keep it safe from collision with other automobiles.

"Hello!" called another motorist, slowing up his machine. "Are you in trouble?"

"Yes," said Scott laconically, not to say curtly.

"Is your machine 'dead'?" was the next question.

"As dead as I am," replied the senator.

Sweeny's Dumb-waiter

By Charles R. Barnes

Author of "Sweeny, the Detective," "Mr. Sweeny, Treasure Hunter," Etc.

Dan notices a little thing and shows up better than the whole detective force. Incidentally he contracts some very bad habits

MRS. SWEENY, being in a lonely mood, dropped into the Boarder's apartment for a chat.

"Say," she began, "I s'pose I'm as welcome here as a burglar."

"Indeed," replied the Boarder, "you are really welcome. I've just finished a bit of writing, and I'm glad to be diverted."

"Then," Mrs. Sweeny declared, "I'll set down and tell you how my poor dead Danny was smarter than one of the classiest crooks that ever worked. He was alwus noticin' things; and it was one little thing he noticed and remembered that made him show up better than the whole of the detective force—one little thing, and all the gab that goes up and down a ordinary dumb-waiter. Gee, ain't dumb-waiter conversation fierce, though! There ain't scarcely a day goes by that I don't hear things that makes you think that all the folks in the world is crazy or gettin' there. You've heard parties hollerin' up and down our dumb-waiter, ain't you, mister?"

"Often," the man replied.

"Well," Mrs. Sweeny went on, "it was the dumb-waiter that put Danny hep to the mystery of the Andrews girl. Onct somethin' happened that made him hang around it like kids at a baseball fence knothole. It kinda fascinated him. You see, one evenin' he was passin' by the thing, and the door was open a little. A lady on the top floor was bawlin' out the butcher's boy.

"'Say,' she said, 'the idee of you fetchin' me pork chops,' she says.

"The boy is right back at her.

"'You ordered them chops,' he says, 'and so I fetched them.'

"'Mebby I did order 'em,' she says, 'but my husban' comes home, and he says: "What you got for dinner?" And I says: "Pork chops, dearie;" and you ought to of heard the roar he lets out of him. You gotta take them chops back, kid, and fetch me a pound and a half of liver and bacon. I ain't a lady to criticize,' she says; 'but, be-lieve me, it seems as if any butcher ought to know better than to send pork chops to a lady when her husban' don't want 'em,' she says; 'and I got my opinion of Mr. Schwartzheimer, that keeps your second-rate dump,' she says."

The Boarder smiled.

"I'd consider her somewhat unreasonable," he commented.

"My gosh!" exclaimed Mrs. Sweeny, "is that the best word you can give it? Danny listened to that line of talk, and then went and laid down on the lounge, all in.

"'Belle,' he says, 'no wonder there's divorces and people goin' batty every day,' he says. 'Wimmin is the limit,' he says, 'with the lid off. The feller that said you never can tell what a woman is goin' to do next,' he says, 'had misfit works in his thought plant,' he says. 'You can alwus tell what a woman is goin' to do next,' he says. 'She's goin' to do somethin' crazy,' he says. And I guess, at that, mister, he wasn't so far wrong. When I think over the things I've did, I ain't so awful strong for myself."

The Boarder refrained from remarks, and Mrs. Sweeny went on.

"After that," she said, "Danny couldn't keep away from that dumb-waiter. He hung round it like old maids to the new minister; and he was alwus hearin' madhouse talk and tryin' to make sense of it. You can hear everything on a dumb-waiter, from ladies kickin' about their neighbors to the ice-man tellin' somebody how much they owes, and sayin' come across with the coin or I don't bring no more ice. My Danny usta say that a dumb-waiter was human nature in a nutty shell; and you can take it from me that he was right. If the private side of folks' lives was knowed, there ain't no tellin' how many more million more inmates there'd be in the bughouses. Some puffecly sane parties is bad enough with their company manners on; and I hate to think how they act when nobody is lookin'.

"Now, we'll get away from this here dumb-waiter business to folks that makes their livin' by doin' things that's against the law—folks that ain't slick enough to do 'em, and own country homes and keep out of jail. Danny, bein' a race-track gambler, knowed a lot of 'em. I guess, mister, that pretty soon you'll be thinkin' that he didn't know nothin' but crooks, won't you? My gee, it seems like I ain't been tellin' you no things at all lately, except them that has to do with that sort of gents and ladies!"

"Yes," the Boarder admitted, "your husband certainly had an extensive acquaintance in the underworld."

"He sure did," Mrs. Sweeny agreed; "but it was all in the day's work. And he come to know Pete Marks and his wife through his bookmakin'. Pete was a curious sort of a gent. He wouldn't do no burglar business, but was all the time gettin' up schemes for makin' big money all in a lump in ways that was out of the ordinary. Onct he went down in Wall Street and got the dope on the bank-messenger business. Then he spotted one of 'em with a satchel, hollered 'Stop thief!' and grabbed that there satchel. The crowd didn't butt in when Pete beat it away, thinkin' it sure b'longed to him. He'd of made a lot of money that time, only there wasn't nothin' in the bag but checks and things, and payment was stopped on 'em. But you see the idee, don't you? Pete didn't have no specialty."

The Boarder nodded, and his landlady carried her yarn along further.

"All folks has bugs about somethin' to eat, mister, and Pete's bug was kippered herring. Be-lieve me, that man thought more of kippered herring than Danny did of the things bartenders sells. He'd of walked a mile and a quarter for one of them little fishes, and four miles for two. Goodness knows them herrings ain't a lovely mess; but Pete would of beat his wife twice a week instead of once just to smell one. That was how strong he was for the stuff. His wife was all the time offerin' up thanks that it was kippered herring instead of morphine that her husban' was attached to. He run things into the ground, and you might say he buried 'em and hisself with 'em. I guess you've met people like that."

"Often," answered the Boarder.

"About the time Danny begun rubberin' at the dumb-waiter," Mrs. Sweeny resumed, "Mrs. Gold Dollar Cohen b'gun to run after them funny religions that's sprung on our city every onct in a while. One of them Umpah guys got her goin'. I guess you know what I mean. Them fellers wear robes and turbans, hire a hall in a swell hotel, and make you believe in a lot of bunk that the priests in India, or Borneo, or some place like that, dreamed out after their hop parties. Nobody can understand it; but they stick like they do to the fifteen puzzle. It's more interestin' than bridge, b'cause anybody can understand bridge after a little teachin', but nobody never was knowed to understand them Umpah religions.

"The guy that got Mrs. Gold Dollar goin' was named Gongh Rah; and he certainly had some class about him. Mrs. Gold Dollar had followed the races with her husban' for twelve years; and you had to go some to put anything across on her. She was wise. But this Rah party had her burnin' punk sticks all over the house like it was skeeter time in Jersey and goin' broke buyin'

Oriental clothes—kinda kimono things. He give her books to read that like to drove her wild. Once she come runnin' in on me, and says:

"'Belle,' she says, 'for the love of Mike,' she says, 'come along with me. We'll get a bowl of chop suey some place,' she says, 'and listen to them Chinks talk and try to understand w'at they say,' she says. 'I want somethin' easy,' she says, 'for my head's most split tryin' to get a line on what that there Rah man is drivin' at,' she says.

"'What's doin' now?' I says.

"'I wisht I knowed,' she says, 'for, if I did, I wouldn't be worryin' so,' she says. 'Accordin' to them books,' she says, 'my soul is doin' a aëroplane act,' she says, 'and is now searchin' the back streets of Calcutta, India, lookin' for me,' she says.

"'Huh,' I says, 'that soul ain't wise, so it seems to me.'

"'That,' she says, 'is just w'at I'm a thinkin',' she says. 'W'y don't it come to New York and look in the telephone book?' she says. 'It don't seem right,' she says, 'that such a mutt thing like that soul could belong to me. I dassent tell my husban' w'at I know,' she says, 'for he sure has got enough on me already; and if he knowed I had a shoestring soul like I got,' she says, 'he sure would turn me out, and I'd have to sell papers for a livin',' she says.

"I talked to her a long time about cuttin' out the funny religions that is continual handin' a party's soul thousand-mile tickets; but the Rah gent'm'n had got in his work. There was a lot of queer and distressin' fixin's in that new religion; but the soul with the wanderlust was the biggest item. It worried Mrs. Gold Dollar half to death.

"You see, the Rah had told his comeons that they had some sort of a soul in 'em all the time; but if they done wrong, or was out of sorts and not tuned up to the soul's idee of things, then out skips that soul and finds a place more to its likin'.

"Most of the time, Mrs. Gold Dollar was awful embarrassed, b'cause she figgered that at times some man's soul was in her. She kept blushin' painful for a week, till the Rah feller told her that only ladies' souls visited ladies, and men's souls was at home in men. That was some relief to her; but the idee of her soul wanderin' and roamin' here and there kept her worried, like a lady worries about her little boy that's playin' out in the street and no tellin' what the trolley car's did to him.

"I know that this stuff is awful nonsense, mister. I'm only tellin' it to you so you'll know the sort of a thing that was comin' off. Lots of them India parties gets away with it, mostly to wimmin that has pet dogs—them kind of people. You've read in the papers about them Umpah religions, ain't you?"

Like all newspaper readers, the Boarder was familiar with the beturbaned folk, and, as soon as Mrs. Sweeny became aware of the fact, she went on with her story.

"It was just about this time," she said, "that Della Andrews disappeared. There ain't no use tellin' much about that case, b'cause the papers was full of it, and nobody talked of nothin' else. She was a rich girl, about twenty-five years old—one of them literary, culturevated dolls——"

"You've combined two words," remarked the Boarder.

"You forget it," retorted Mrs. Sweeny. "I know what I'm talkin' about, and I ain't goin' to stand for no more call-downs from you. You may write for print; but I can write a letter to my sister Em, and she'll understand what I mean just as good as if I'd hunted out every word in the dictionary. I say that girl was culturevated, and that goes, for she was. She was goodlookin', too, and was ingaged to be married to a swell party. All of a sudden she disappears; and, like nearly alwus happens, the police couldn't find her.

"That disappearance got on my Danny's chest. My gosh, I never see the like of the interest men takes in a case where a pretty girl disappears! You'd think there wasn't no more in the world; and all you got to do to see all you can look at, is to go outdoors on a

sunny day. Pretty girls is commoner than homely ones; and yet Danny or no other man would care a cuss if all the homely ones disappeared.

"But this one was pretty, and she was all Danny could think about. He read everything that was printed in the papers. And when any of his fr'en's dropped in—Gold Dollar Cohen or Yellow Money Einstein, or any of them fellers—Della Andrews was the most prom'nent part of the conversation, except the orders to our hired girl to fetch in another round of drinks.

"Yes, sir, that doll sure had Danny and the rest of 'em goin'. All the time they speculated on what had happened to her. Yellow Money Einstein, bein' romantic and four times married, was sure that she had eloped with a handsome but poor man—mebby a curly-headed Greek, that had perhaps been shinin' her shoes at his stand in front of the corner saloon.

"Danny, bein' practical, wouldn't lissen to that kind of talk. He just knew that Della Andrews had been murdered and throwed in a pond, like so many is; and it made him real mad to have anybody think different. You see, mister, Danny read the papers, and knowed how such things ought to be.

"Now, while all this was comin' off, the whole apartment house got excited because the Rah party had came to live there. He didn't show hisself much, goin' out early in the evenin' mostly and gettin' home late. But some of the neighbors seen him, and was real awe-struck at him. He was brown as the mornin' tastes in Danny's mouth, and he wore them fortune-teller clothes—or mebby I ought to say he was got up like Little Egypt's father. He had a flat above us—him and his wife—and Danny took to listenin' at the dumb-waiter door worse than ever.

" 'Belle,' he says, 'now's my chance to find out the habits of them foreigners,' he says. 'I found out already that they're strong for the liquor store,' he says, 'for the lady up there hollers down to the delivery kid to fetch over a dozen bottles of beer every day,' he says.

" 'Danny,' I says, 'you're a old gossip,' I says. 'You better keep away from that there dumb-waiter,' I says, 'or you'll be doin' knittin' next,' I says, 'and keepin' a parrot.'

"It's all right, mister, for ladies to rubber in on their neighbors' business, but it didn't seem to me like men's work, and I didn't like to see my husban' gettin' so femalish. I'd ruther he'd keep in his proper spear, and kick about the meals and complain that he never could find no clean laundry. Listenin' at the dumb-waiter looked the same to me as makin' beds or tellin' the janitor's wife what you think of the lady across the hall. Some things, mister, belongs to ladies, and some things belongs to gent'm'n. You know that as well as I do."

The Boarder nodded.

"I get your point of view," he said.

"Yes," Mrs. Sweeny assured him, "that was my point of view, all right; but it turned out to be a disappoint of view, for my Danny never paid no attention to what I said. It was him for that little chute; and, whenever he was to home, he hung round it steady as a drinkin' man to a bottle of rum. There wasn't much talk goin' up and down that he didn't hear. Then, one evenin', he come runnin' in to where I was kinda puzzled.

" 'Say, Belle,' he says, 'the next time you see Mrs. Gold Dollar Cohen,' he says, 'you ast her if them souls has to have a special kind of a diet,' he says, 'to make 'em pufform.'

" 'Why should I ast her that, Danny?' I says.

" 'B'cause,' he says, 'I shouldn't wonder if the whole secret of 'em journeyin' round,' he says, 'was the eatin'. My gosh,' he says, 'if somebody was to feed me and my soul on kippered herring,' he says, 'I'm dead sure that the soul would quit me,' he says, 'and find some place where there was roast beef and chops and such things on the bill of fare,' he says.

" 'Danny,' I says, 'what you drivin' at?' I says.

" 'Be-lieve me,' he says, 'that guinea upstairs has sent out for kippered herring twice,' he says. 'I'm beginnin' to s'pect that he's got the habit like Pete

Marks. And if he has got it, it's a sure sign that he's a crook. Ain't Pete Marks a crook?'

"'Mister, that husban' of mine was sure a genius for reasonin' out things. You couldn't get ahead of him. And, while he was talkin', the more I thought about what he said, the more sure I got that the Umpah man was a crook. Respectable folks may eat kippered herring once in a while, the same as they can stay away from church, or lie when it's necessary. But when a guy makes a habit of kippered herring, then you want to watch out for him, the same as you'd watch out for some party that was truthful only in spots.

"Danny figgered it out like that, too; and mebby he wasn't the steadfast regular at the dumb-waiter door afterward.

"A couple of days passed, with Danny listenin' at that there dumb-waiter all the time he could spare away from his business and the s'loons. And then one mornin' he come to me all excited.

"'Hindu!' he says, sarcastic as you ever seen anybody. 'Hindu!'

"'You mean the man upstairs?' I says.

"'I do that,' he says. 'And take it from me, Belle, he ain't no more Hindu than a nickel-plated match box,' he says.

"'W'at is he, then?' I says.

"'He's Pete Marks,' Danny says, 'loose from a dyein' establishment. I been thinkin' all along that I recognized that voice, yelpin' for kippered herring,' he says, 'and just now I got sure of it. The feller up there was pannin' out a delivery boy, and tellin' him what good service they had down to Fifty-eighth Street. Pete usta live there; and I know most darned well that it's him that hollers for them kippered herrings,' Danny says. 'I don't need no better evidence than that nobody but Pete would holler for kippered herrings more'n once a month,' he says. 'Belle,' he says, 'what you think his graft is?'

"I couldn't answer that, mister, and neither could my husban'. But you can bet on it that Danny got on the dumb-waiter job like he was a sojer boy and all was silent along the Potomac. You could hardly pry him away from the little door. And, as I've told you b'fore, he was one of them real determined men; and I knowed that Pete Marks would have to be smooth as a hard-boiled egg to keep what he was doin' away from my husban'.

"Things run along like that a little while longer, Danny readin' up on the Della Andrews case and prowlin' 'round the dumb-waiter door. We was sittin' in the front room one night about ten o'clock, just dopin' over nothin' in putticular, w'en my husban' makes a quick trip to the dumb-waiter. He's gone about five minnits, and I'm beginnin' to think up a good call-down to hand him for his old-lady habits, w'en back he comes, and there's a serious look in his eyes.

"'Belle,' he says, 'somethin' is startin' upstairs,' he says. 'There's loud talk goin' on; but I can't hear it very plain, b'cause they got their dumb-waiter door shut tight,' he says.

"'Well,' I says, 'let 'em alone,' I says. 'Fam'lies has got a right to start somethin' onct in a while,' I says. 'It's part of happy married life,' I says.

"But Danny couldn't see it that way.

"'Belle,' he says, 'it ain't no secret a tall,' he says, 'that I don't like the looks of matters up there,' he says. 'I'm goin' to get satisfied in my mind what's bein' brung off,' he says.

"And with them words, he ducks back to that there chute, and opens the door wide. I followed him, and what does he do but pull up the little elevator and climb on the top of it.

"'Danny,' I says, 'quit that there foolishness. If some one would see you,' I says, 'you'd get shot for bein' a burglar,' I says. But he wouldn't hear w'at I was sayin'. He catched hold of the rope and pulled hisself up to the Markses' floor. Then the elevator stopped, and I stood there, lookin' up with my heart in my mouth, like a Swiss-cheese sandwich, and hopin' to John that nothin' turrible would happen."

Mrs. Sweeny paused here to note whether or not the Boarder was properly interested.

"Did anything happen?" he asked.

"Well," she said, "I'll tell you about it. Danny wasn't a man to crab somebody's act w'en it was only pickin' pockets or some legitimate line of crook business. But Pete Marks was goin' too strong for him. W'en Danny got up to the dumb-waiter door that opened into Pete's apartment, he could hear a argument that had got off to a good start. A lady that wasn't Mrs. Marks was sayin':

"'Sir, I tell you plainly that I am beginnin' to distrust you. Also I have come to the conclusion that I am forcibly detained here.'

"Pete, he says: 'Madam, such is not the case. You can go w'enever you want to; but I advise you not to be hasty. Your soul, as you know, is now puffec'ly satisfied in the body of Mrs. Jennie Trommer, of Boise City.'

"'So you say,' the lady says; 'but I ain't so sure. I feel that I'm wakin' up. Here you've kept me in this apartment and prevented communication with the outside world, and I don't like the looks of it. You've exerted some peculiar influence over me—hypnotism, perhaps—but now I am comin' to myself. I demand my release.'

"Pete wasn't for that, a tall.

"'Miss Andrews,' he says, 'you know puffecly well that you'll never be real happy till you get your soul back. And while it's residin' in Mrs. Trommer, and she's satisfied with life, there's nothin' doin'. You'd better follow my advice. Pay over to me ten thousand dollars and I'll work out my plan. I'll start a rival groc'ry store in the same block where Trommer's got his. I'll undersell him and drive him out of business. Then Mrs. Trommer, not bein' able to get the bonnets and shawls she wants, like she's gettin' now, is goin' to be cross, and pan out her husban' and feel abused. She'll be so darned discontented that your soul won't be able to live with her, and will come back to you. It b'longs in you, and not the soul of that Broadway show girl that you're wearin' now. Do w'at I say, Miss Andrews, and all will be peaceful with you.'

"Be-lieve me, mister, that looked like the limit to Danny. He couldn't stand for it. So he just busted in the dumb-waiter door, jumped into the apartment, and faced them people that was there. They was Pete, and his wife, and Della Andrews. And you can just bet that they was su'prised.

"'Miss Andrews,' says Danny, 'you don't know me; but you can just lay down a little bet that w'at I'm goin' to hand you is the truth. This here man, all dyed up and dressed dizzy, like you see him, is nothin' but a crook and a faker. His name is Pete Marks. Come along with me, and I'll show you his police record down to headquarters,' he says. 'My name is Dan Sweeny, and I'm a hon'rable bookmaker follerin' the races,' he says, 'from Saratoga to Noo Orleans,' he says.

"The girl looked at Danny a minnit, then she turns to Pete:

"'I shall follow this man's advice,' she says, 'and leave this apartment under his pertection.'

"Pete looked my Danny over, and says: 'I didn't think it of you, Sweeny,' he says.

"'I could think anything of you,' says Danny. And with that he leads the way to the door, and took Della out. It didn't take very long to get a cab for her, and she went home."

"What became of the Markses?" asked the Boarder.

"They moved that night," Mrs. Sweeny explained. "Later on, we found that they had went to the seashore, where folks took the dye for tan. You see," she finished, "Pete, as I said, was uncommon in his methods."

You've seen those merry-eyed fellows who stick their heads through a hole in a sheet and invite you to hit them with a baseball—if you can. Dan Sweeny was once a ball-dodger of that type. You'll hear about it in the next Popular, out two weeks hence, November 25th

His Mother's Doughnuts

By Ralph D. Paine

Author of "The Prodigy," "The Heart of Peter Burnham," Etc.

Doughnuts and pies are not usually prescribed for nerve food. But here is a case where they worked wonders on a varsity football team and put an ambitious youngster back in the game

STUART WHITNEY was playing a slashing game at guard on the Yale eleven. In appearance he was all that a powerful young athlete ought to be. His shoulders were quite like those which adorn the widely advertised "college clothes," his chin was determined enough to fit the profile of a Gibson man, and as for height he could have looked a Du Maurier girl squarely between the eyes. In short, he was a proper hero for a story, for he had a modest opinion of himself, and his manners were pleasing.

The football coaches had watched him carefully through his freshman year, and were convinced that he had brains and that indispensable quality known as "sand." Therefore, when he reported for practice at the beginning of his fall term as a sophomore, Whitney was admitted to the exclusive company of the varsity squad and training table.

It was a bruising season in Yale football annals. Most of the veterans had been graduated, and the new material was green and unsteady. The coaches were overanxious, and they drove the men harder than was wise. That experienced trainer, Mike Morrison, was vigilant lest their physical condition be whetted to too fine an edge, and kept his eye open for symptoms of overtraining.

There seemed no reason to worry about Stuart Whitney, however, for he looked so hale and rugged that he fairly set the pace for the rest of the rush line, and played his opponents of the second eleven to a standstill.

Now, the truth was that this young cyclone of a guard was only nineteen years of age and had grown exceedingly fast, but because of his splendid physique a man's work was expected of him, and he demanded it of himself. It happened quite naturally that by the middle of the playing season he began to feel the strain, although he failed to comprehend what ailed him.

He was unable to switch his thoughts from football. The team formations, the signals, the tactics of his own position, his mistakes, the chiding of the coaches, churned together in his mind by day and night. He dreaded the daily practice, but when the time came to take the field he got a grip on himself, and displayed his customary prowess. He kept his anxious, unhappy cogitations to himself, taking it for granted that the other men of the team must be in a similar state of mind, and afraid of showing the white feather by telling his troubles to the trainer. His roommate surmised that things were going rather wrong, and asked one night:

"Aren't they working you a bit too hard, Stuart, old man? I am no football expert, but I've trotted out to the field almost every afternoon to watch the practice, and I've never seen you out of the game for a minute."

The varsity guard was scowling at a penciled diagram of a "tackle shift" formation, but he brightened to answer with assumed heartiness:

"Oh, I'm husky enough to stand it, Jack. You see, I need a lot of hammering into shape before the Princeton

and Harvard games, and as the biggest man in the line the coaches aren't going to coddle me. What makes you think I am stale?"

"Oh, your nerves are jumpy at times, and you talk in your sleep and fight your pillow," quoth Jack. "But I didn't intend to make you worry about yourself. As long as Mike Morrison considers you fit, it is none of my business, I suppose."

Whitney smiled cheerfully, and reassured his chum:

"My appetite for training-table grub isn't quite as keen as it was, but my weight keeps up pretty well, and I hit the line hard if I do say it myself. Varsity football is always a good deal of a strain, I imagine, and I am a new hand at the game. It will come easier next year."

The other man nodded somewhat dubiously, and returned to his books, while the athlete tramped downstairs for a walk before bedtime. He was restless, and his head ached. The game against West Point was only a week away, and the stalwart cadet against whom he would be pitted had been named in the All-America eleven of the preceding year.

For the first time, Stuart Whitney was conscious of being afraid of football. He tried to fight it down, but in his heart lurked the vague, unmanly hope that he might be disabled before the West Point game. And the realization of this dreadful attack of cowardice afflicted him with such profound melancholy that tears came to his eyes.

Having, at length, rid himself of the specter of fear, he was surprised to find that the melancholy still lingered. He felt sad, without knowing quite why. And, more than this, he became suddenly, acutely homesick. Just to be far away from the football field, to loaf at his ease in the dear, old-fashioned house among his own people, who never blackguarded and scolded him—why, the thought of it made him gulp and dig his fists in his eyes.

For some time he walked through quiet, darkened streets, ashamed and surprised at his singular moods, and drifted back to the campus, still haunted by thoughts of home.

Next morning these phantoms seemed to have fled. Strong and refreshed, he strode to the training-table quarters for breakfast, and was glad to meet his comrades of the loyal fellowship of the eleven. He was one of them, a picked man, chosen to uphold the honor and traditions of his college. It was something to be immensely proud of; it was worth fighting for, and he wasn't going to be a sniveling kid and disgrace himself and the team.

With these bracing reflections, Whitney surveyed the hearty breakfast fare, but his execution was feeble. His gorge rose at sight of the oatmeal, potatoes, and rare steaks, which the other men consumed with such healthy ardor. He was suddenly tired of this food, and he only picked at it. The captain was in haste to meet one of the coaches before chapel, and he failed to notice the guard's lack of appetite.

"I suppose I ought to see Mike Morrison and tell him I'm off my feed this morning," Whitney said to himself. "And I do feel sort of disinclined to think of the next meal. But maybe I'll round to during the forenoon."

He felt his vigor slacken through the next few hours, and he frequently yawned, but this he laid to the stuffy air of the classrooms. When he strolled into the dressing room of the athletic house at the field, Mike Morrison scrutinized him, but observed nothing unusual in his appearance or demeanor. The Herculean young guard was on the point of confessing his troubles, but the full back just then thumped him on the back, and exclaimed laughingly:

"You old horse, you! The rest of us look pale and careworn, but you thrive on this man-killing slavery. No danger of your going stale, is there?"

The guard smiled and nodded. His anxiety must be a false alarm. He went to his locker, and pulled out his grimy, stained, football clothes. Without warning, he was seized with a sort of nervous trembling which frightened him, and fear again clutched at his heart.

He could not bear to reveal such shameful emotions. The weakness passed, and he followed his comrades, who romped across the turf to the playing field.

A famous guard of other days had returned to help the coaches. This hero was none other than the formidable "Pudge" Osterhaus, who had been for four years the terror of all his foemen. He grinned amiably at sight of Stuart Whitney, and announced his intention of taking the youngster in hand and showing him a few things.

Whitney was pained to note that the gigantic veteran had donned football clothes, and was prepared to take his place in the rush line of the second eleven.

Pudge Osterhaus was not a brutal player, but he was rough and hard, and he had been trained in a school which believed that football was no sport for mollycoddles. Although several years had passed since his graduation, he was still sound of wind and tough of muscle, and he was painstakingly anxious to aid in the education of young Whitney at guard.

The latter played manfully during the earlier scrimmages, breaking through and blocking with a dash and intelligence which caused Osterhaus to grunt approval. But the youngster was playing on his nerves. Something had gone wrong with his endurance, yet he had no notion of quitting.

At length the veteran sent him sprawling by means of a crafty, sidelong thrust, and as he fell the flying arm of the runner smote Whitney on the nose and made it bleed. He rolled over, sat up, held his smarting nose in his fist, and, to his own acute astonishment, began to weep. The other men waited, eying him curiously, and one of the coaches asked:

"Is your nose broken? Better let Mike look at it."

Stuart Whitney, who had come to the end of his tether, looked up through his tears, and blubbered:

"No, my nose isn't broken. B-but I guess I have p-played out."

"Nonsense! Show your sand. You're the deuce of a picture of a Yale varsity guard!" sharply spoke up Osterhaus. "Do you want us to telephone for a nurse and a baby carriage?"

Alas, the disgraced athlete could not rally in the face of such an insult as this! He felt queerly unlike himself. There was neither shame nor resentment in his mind, only tearful sadness. What he wanted to say would sound incredibly foolish, but he could not help saying it. His accents were broken as he exclaimed:

"I want to go home. I can't play any more football. I want some of my mother's pie and doughnuts. There isn't anything else in the world that will make me feel right again. And I'm going to have 'em if I get fired from the team for it."

Some of the players laughed uproariously, but the captain and Mike Morrison put their heads together in hasty consultation, after which the trainer said with a troubled air:

"You trot over to the house and change your clothes, Whitney, and then you take a hack and go to the campus and pack a bag. You are bound home on the next train out of New Haven, and you stay there and eat mother's pie and doughnuts until you hear from me."

With never a glance behind him, the youngster trotted from the field, and his face was shining with happiness.

Mike Morrison turned to the captain, and observed in his most serious manner:

"This breakdown is up to me, I suppose. The boy is badly overtrained, and he just went to pieces without any warning. But how was I to see it coming? He looked as fit as a brick house, and he hasn't complained of feeling wrong since the season began. His mother's pie and doughnuts! Well, well, let him have 'em. We'll have him back here in a week, ready to play for his life. When they go stale, it catches 'em all sorts of ways. But this is a new wrinkle. I suppose he brooded over pie and doughnuts because they were forbidden at the training table. And it made him homesick."

The grizzled trainer of many generations of Yale athletes was a psychologist after his own fashion, and he knew better than to poke fun at the whimsical, childish yearning of Stuart Whitney after his mother's pie and doughnuts. The confession had been symbolistic. The boy wanted something as different from the football routine as possible. And Mike Morrison was sufficiently sensible and experienced to humor him.

As for the fugitive himself, he lost no time in taking his departure for a small city on the upper Delaware River. During the overnight journey, his emotions were harrowed by the conviction that he had humiliated himself beyond words and that he was probably viewed at Yale as a social and athletic outcast. He bought a New York morning newspaper in the train, and winced at sight of a spicy headline:

YALE VARSITY GUARD CRIES FOR MOTHER'S DOUGHNUTS

"I shall never hear the last of it," he ruefully reflected, "but, anyhow, while there's life there's hope, and I may play guard in the big games, after all. It depends on how fast I get into condition again, so the worst thing I can do is to mope and hold post-mortems. But, great Scott, that was an extraordinary performance!"

And the saner he became as he drew nearer home, the more inexplicable it seemed. He was no longer a boy, but a man, in his own estimation. He stood six feet two in his stockings, and weighed two hundred and four pounds when in fighting trim. And he had wept because Pudge Osterhaus tapped him on the nose, and he had demanded his mother's pie and doughnuts as the only solace the world could offer!

It would have comforted him to hear Mike Morrison's diagnosis of the case, but the fact that he was going home had power to chase football from the weary brain of the overtrained guard, and when the train halted at the Ballardvale Station, he had begun to think life worth living.

He had telegraphed his father of his coming, and that genial man, a physician by profession, was waiting with the familiar sorrel mare and hooded buggy. The son overtopped him by a foot or so as they shook hands.

"You needn't explain, Stuart," briskly interrupted the doctor, as the son began to stammer his singular story. "A telegram came from your head coach this morning, and I took the liberty of reading it. He orders you to quit worrying, loaf, and play, and fill up on pie and doughnuts until further notice. Mother is in the kitchen filling the order. So you tried to do too much, eh?"

"It looks that way, sir. I didn't know what was the matter with me until I sort of wilted and made an ass of myself."

"Um-m! I had a patient once, a business man—he looked as strong as an ox," began the father. "But, pshaw! what is the use of telling old stories? You were tired, and you needed a dose of home."

They drove at a rapid gait to the rambling house overlooking the river. The athlete's mother was on the porch to greet her youngest son, ready to pet and baby and spoil him to his heart's content. He caught her up in his arms, and carried her into the hall, where, lo and behold, a pan of crisp, warm doughnuts was conspicuous upon a small table.

With a great, boyish laugh, he kissed her, and then demolished a doughnut with two bites. She ran to summon the motherly cook, who had grown gray in the service of the household, and the two women returned with a tray of juicy, flaky pies as Exhibit B.

"Here, I don't want to die of the colly-wobbles in my little insides!" exclaimed the son. "Better lock 'em up and deal them to me one at a time. My, oh, my, but I am glad to be home!"

The mother needed no explanation whatever. Stuart had been brutally treated by the football tyrants of Yale. Because he was so big and strong and handsome they had tried to make him play the game for the whole team. And

when he was worn out, he had turned to his mother, which was just what she expected him to do.

All that first day at home, he lounged and chatted and slept at intervals, and managed to let football drift into the background of his thoughts. It was luxurious to be untrammeled, rid of the strain and stress of the playing field, away from the incessant talk about the game.

Next morning, however, after fourteen hours of unvexed sleep, the Yale guard was like a giant refreshed, and announced his intention of going out to find some of his old friends.

"Sally Ryder has come back from California," said his mother. "This is her first visit home since she went out there to take care of that invalid aunt of hers two years ago. She is quite the young lady now."

"She must be eighteen or so by this time," remarked Stuart, with perceptible interest. "Is she a good looker? She was an awful gawk as a little girl."

"I think Sally is almost a beauty," answered his mother, "but you blasé young college men are very critical."

"I may look her up," said he. "I suppose that kid brother of hers is in the high school. He used to torment the life out of her."

"Yes, Dick Ryder is still a high-school student, but I imagine that he is too busy to tease Sally. He was elected captain of the school football team this fall."

The Yale guard was convalescing so rapidly that he pricked up his ears at this, and declared, to the consternation of his mother:

"I may drop around to see them practice this afternoon. Perhaps the boys would appreciate it if I should offer to coach them a bit."

"But football is tabooed!" cried she.

"Oh, this would be only play for me," he explained. "And it is an excellent symptom. Your pie and doughnuts have already worked wonders."

In the course of a leisurely pilgrimage among the pleasant residence streets of Ballardvale, he chanced, at length, to discern at a distance a young person of an aspect familiar yet agreeably strange. Sally Ryder had indeed outgrown her commonplace girlhood, and was worthy of notice, even by a Yale sophomore. She was so slim and tall and dignified that he was quite fluttered by this meeting, which seemed to cause her no responsive emotion.

"Why, how do you do, Stuart?" said she, offering him a small, gloved hand, which was quite lost in the depths of his manly fist. "I supposed that you were in college. How can the football team spare you, right in the middle of the season?"

She was so very self-possessed that he became grandly formal in turn, and vouchsafed:

"I was ordered home for a few days' vacation, Sally—er—I mean Miss Ryder."

"But you are looking awfully well, Mr. Whitney. I hope you were not sent home by the faculty."

He looked sulky at this, but there was some satisfaction in discovering that she had not heard the ignominious story of his enforced absence.

"Oh, the faculty had nothing to do with it," he replied. "The trainer and the head coach thought I was overtrained, you know. I expect to play against Harvard."

At this the demeanor of the attractive young person became positively haughty as she declaimed:

"I expect to see the game, and I shall cheer for Harvard."

"What! Why, I thought you were a true-blue Yale girl!" exclaimed the young man, honestly surprised and shocked. "When did you change colors?"

"While I was living in California. I met a number of very charming Harvard men, and they persuaded me to change my allegiance. There is so much more culture and polish at Harvard, don't you know."

Stuart turned very red, and glowered at the unoffending landscape. He tried to think of an adequately biting retort, but could only grumble:

"So you have been listening to the silly nonsense about Harvard gentlemen

and Yale muckers. It seems to me that living in California didn't do you a whole lot of good."

Miss Sally Ryder deigned not to bandy words, but bade him a crisp good morning, and went her way, observing to herself:

"I really had to put him in his place. These varsity athletes expect all the girls to lose their heads over them. But he has grown to be a perfectly stunning-looking chap. Why didn't he stand up for Yale and scold me for being so horrid?"

The flaunting disloyalty of this impertinent young person made Stuart Whitney feel rather unhappy. She was by all odds the most attractive girl in town, and further acquaintance might make his vacation exceedingly enjoyable.

Girls were contrary creatures; one had to humor their whims, and he could argue her out of this absurd bias toward Harvard. It would be good policy to begin the campaign by showing a friendly interest in her young brother, Dick, captain of the high-school eleven and an ardent champion of Yale, which he was preparing to enter. Therefore, Stuart Whitney betook himself in the early afternoon to the school grounds.

A group of lads of assorted sizes had begun to practice signal drill, and among them the Yale athlete recognized the sturdy figure of the brother of Miss Sally Ryder.

As Whitney sauntered near, they began to laugh and whisper among themselves, and stood waiting, but not with the air of respectful admiration which so renowned a campus hero might reasonably expect.

Whitney felt that they were regarding him with critical disapproval. It was perfectly absurd, of course, but he was distinctly uncomfortable as he moved nearer and said cordially to the captain of the team:

"Hello, Dick! How are things? Pretty good-looking lot of material you have there. How are they playing?"

Dick Ryder walked slowly away from his comrades until he could talk beyond earshot of them. He discussed his eleven rather absent-mindedly, and his boyish face reflected serious concern. It required a good deal of courage for him to confess what lay so heavy on his mind, but, after a false start or two, he blurted hurriedly:

"I'm a terribly strong rooter for Yale, you know that, and the fellows have been guying me, and I'd like to talk it over with you as man to man."

"What in the world are you driving at?" asked Whitney, with an amused smile.

"Well, one of my team got hold of a New York paper, and it had a story about you," faltered the lad. "It said that you lost your sand on the field when Pudge Osterhaus stood you on your head. And—and you cried for some of your mother's doughnuts and all that sort of thing. All you have to do is deny it, and I'll make the fellows quit their talk if I have to fight 'em one at a time."

Whitney was angry, then touched by the loyalty of this youthful follower of Yale. It was preposterous that he should have to defend himself in the eyes of these high-school youths, but he explained with tolerant patience:

"It was a case of overtraining, Dick. I shall be back at guard on the Yale team next week. I just went stale, without realizing it."

Dick Ryder nodded gravely, and exclaimed:

"That's what I told the fellows. But they can't imagine a Yale varsity guard doing that sort of thing. I thought it was a newspaper fake. Say, I have been awfully careful to keep it from my sister Sally. She has switched over to Harvard. Girls are fickle that way. She would pester me to death."

The persistency of this boyish inquisitor nettled Whitney, and he flung back rather peevishly:

"What difference can it make to me what you young tadpoles think about anything? I was going to offer to coach you for two or three days, but it looks as if I were not appreciated."

Sadly and reproachfully, Dick Ryder murmured:

"Then, it's true. You did cry for mother's doughnuts right in the middle of a Yale game, on the Yale field. Of course, I think it would be a great privilege to have you coach us, but——"

"I have a good mind to give you a sound spanking!" roared Whitney. "What do you know about varsity football? As for your sister, you may tell her whatever you like. Apparently she doesn't want to hear anything good of a Yale man."

With this, the injured Whitney turned his back on the accusatory group, and stalked away, hot and sulky. He wished to have nothing whatever to do with the fascinating but disloyal Sally Ryder, and, as for her "kid brother," he was a presumptuous, ignorant young nuisance.

The fates so ordered it, however, that when Stuart sallied forth in the evening of this same day to favor another girl with the light of his presence, he encountered in her house the fair Sally herself, who seemed in no hurry to depart. The manner of the athlete was perceptibly distraught, and he was far from brilliant company.

While he gloomily speculated as to whether she had read that hateful newspaper article, she solved the problem by remarking with mirthful mischief in her eyes:

"I am sure Mr. Whitney is dying for some homemade doughnuts, Sue. Have you any in the pantry?"

The other girl was properly displeased, and replied severely: "How horrid of you, Sally! Stuart is trying to forget football while he is at home."

"So you have heard the sad story," said Whitney, trying to look cheerful. "And I suppose you think I am a sandless cry-baby and a disgrace to the Yale eleven."

"Oh, I should never be rude enough to intimate such things," sweetly returned Sally Ryder. "The incident must have made amusing reading at Harvard. My poor brother Dick is in the most distressful state of mind. It is such fun teasing him. Really, Mr. Whitney, I am as sympathetic as can be."

There followed more gentle but stinging raillery, which the badgered athlete was powerless to parry. His evening spoiled, he made an early excuse to depart, and wandered through the streets for some time before returning home, where he was determined to keep his troubles to himself.

To have a girl, and a very pretty one, think him sandless, was a bitter thought indeed. Wait until the Harvard game, he savagely reflected, and he would show her what Yale sand was like! At this moment his intentions toward his opponent of the Harvard rush line fell little short of manslaughter.

Next morning this injured young man announced to his doting mother that he needed exercise to keep him fit, and that he felt like taking a long walk over the river-valley road. The autumn air was bracing, and even an athlete, who had been injured in the region of his feelings, could not be content to sulk in idleness.

He struck out from the town with a lusty, swinging stride, which easily covered mile after mile, and his heart rejoiced to find how fit of wind and limb he was. His nerves were no longer overtaut, there was no such thing as fear in the world, and he was hungry for the headlong, hammering toil of the football field.

Leaving the turnpike, he swung off through a less-traveled road, which he remembered led to the falls of the Bear River and the property of the extensive paper mills situated in the heart of the hilly forest country.

As Stuart Whitney rounded a curve of a lonely and heavily wooded part of this road, a startling spectacle abruptly confronted him.

A buckboard and pair of horses had been halted by several swarthy, unkempt men who had rushed from ambush an instant before Whitney beheld them. Two were clinging to the bits of the frightened horses, and at least four others were attacking the gray-bearded driver and a younger companion.

For a moment or so, the mêlée raged almost in silence. The highwaymen cried briefly to one another in some for-

eign tongue, but they did not use the revolvers which gleamed in their hands.

The younger man in the buckboard caught up a rifle from the floor of the vehicle, but so suddenly had he been surprised that the hand-to-hand struggle was raging before he could make room to use it.

Whitney stood stock-still for an instant. The scene was unreal, incredible. It was more like a moving-picture film than anything else. Then he recognized the gray-bearded man in the buckboard as old Major Robbins, paymaster of the paper mills, and he understood the situation. The prize at stake was the currency, thousands of dollars, in those battered old leather bags of his which he was carrying from the bank in Ballardvale.

The youth who had been afraid of the West Point eleven and who had cried for his mother's doughnuts, hesitated no longer than was required for him to gather his wits together and wrench a split hickory rail from the top of the nearest fence.

Even as he did so, he heard a pistol shot, and Major Robbins reeled sidewise with a crippled arm.

The doughty old paymaster was a dear friend of Stuart's father. Immense wrath and indignation made the athlete oblivious of the odds. The assailants were ready to do murder if necessary. One of them fired again just as Whitney broke into his lone charge. His mouth opened without conscious effort, and he emitted a terrific war whoop as he ran.

The noise of it was disconcerting. It so startled the busy highwaymen that they turned with one accord and faced this reënforcement. Two or three fired at him, but their aim was wild.

The paymaster's companion took instant advantage of the diversion by wrenching free his rifle, clubbing it, and bringing the stock down upon the head of the nearest ruffian with a skull-cracking thump.

The fence rail in the hands of the brawny collegian was a weapon capable of much damage. The foreigners, most of them undersized fellows, had no stomach for engaging this formidable adversary at close quarters. He fell upon them like a modern Hercules, first knocking heels over head the rascal who had Major Robbins by the throat, and then stretching another who was shooting with shaky, futile aim.

The tables were turned in a twinkling. Those unhurt began to scatter toward the shelter of the woods, while Whitney stormed after this one and that.

Presently he gave up the pursuit, and returned to aid the paymaster and help secure the disabled highwaymen. Three of them, considerably damaged, were laid out under a tree by the roadside, after which Major Robbins, grinning joyously in his gray beard, announced with tremendous emphasis:

"Stuart, my boy, you are a chip of the old block. Your daddy and your college ought to be proud of you. It would be absolutely asinine for me to waste time thanking you. You are a doctor's son. Suppose you tie my arm up as well as you can until I get to the mills. It doesn't seem to be broken, thank God! The bullet numbed it, and I have lost considerable blood."

This business Stuart attended to with creditable deftness, after which it was agreed that he should remain to guard the prisoners, while the paymaster and his companion resumed the journey to the mills with the precious leather bags. A crowd of men would be sent back as quickly as possible to carry the captured bandits to the jail at Ballardvale.

"And how did you drop down from Yale in the precise nick of time?" demanded the doughty old paymaster, as he was about to drive off.

Whitney wiped his dripping, dusty face, and answered with a sheepish smile:

"I lost my sand playing football, major, and sat down and cried, right in the middle of a game, for some of mother's pie and doughnuts. So they sent me home to get my nerve back."

The paymaster guffawed at this, and cried by way of farewell:

"Stuff and nonsense! Better take some of those doughnuts back to the

rest of the Yale team. I'll see you again soon."

With a captured revolver in his fist, Whitney stood guard over the sorry, subdued captives for an hour or more. He surmised that they were a band of desperadoes recruited from among the Slavs of the hard-coal country of Pennsylvania, who had invaded this region for the particular purpose of holding up the paymaster's treasure. Inasmuch as they spoke little English, and were at present in no sociable mood, the time dragged heavily.

At length, a party arrived in hot haste from the mills—with them the president of the company, who happened to be inspecting the forest properties. He was effusively grateful, and promised a munificent reward, which the hero declined with boyish embarrassment.

"But Major Robbins had twelve thousand dollars in the buckboard!" exclaimed the portly gentleman. "You must accept salvage. At any rate, I insist that you go back to the mills with me and have luncheon. I simply must hear the details of this tremendous battle."

"Thank you," said Stuart. "I want to see Major Robbins before I go home, and hear what your doctor has to say about his wound."

The president of the company was a gentleman who believed in publicity, and this time his motives were genuinely unselfish. A little later he furnished the afternoon newspaper of Ballardvale with a detailed account of the affair, holding the telephone line for half an hour or more, while he made the editor sit up and blink.

Reporters went scurrying out to the mills, while others stormed the jail to see the prisoners. The heroic conduct of the Yale athlete was the dramatic feature of the story. It made a tremendous sensation, and Whitney was actually afraid to go home. He lingered well into the afternoon, chatting with the president and Major Robbins, before he could muster courage to return to Ballardvale.

"From what we hear over the phone," said he, "the people are making a silly fuss about it. What in thunder else could I do, major? Stand and watch you get drilled full of lead and lose your twelve thousand dollars?"

"A good many men would have hesitated, my boy," said the major. "Go home and eat a plate of those doughnuts and gain courage to face the applause."

Stuart rode home in the president's automobile, that gentleman explaining:

"I have tried to persuade the major to bring his money out in a motor car, but he is old-fashioned in his notions. He has used a buckboard for these trips during the last thirty years, and never had a mishap, his argument being that a car was likely to break down and leave him stranded with his money bags. He'll know better after this."

By nightfall, Stuart Whitney wished that Major Robbins had used an automobile for his treasure trip. In that event, there might not have been any demand for a stalwart young hero.

Ballardvale welcomed an excuse for a celebration. It took the form of a parade to the residence of Doctor Whitney. The mayor was in the forefront, and other prominent citizens crowded the porch, while the populace hurrahed vociferously and interrupted the speech-making.

The brass band, it was learned, had been engaged by the football players of the high school, who marched in a body. They were anxious to make their repentance as impressive as possible, explained the captain, Dick Ryder, who blushed a great deal and told the Yale athlete in unsteady accents:

"We dug into the treasury of the athletic association to charter the band, and we're all so darned sorry and ashamed of ourselves that we'd feel better if you would kick us all over your lawn. And if anybody ever says that you lost your sand at Yale, you just tell him for me that he is a liar."

Stuart offered his hand, which the youngster took with evident pride and gratification.

"You are forgiven," gravely affirmed the Yale man. "Your motives were ex-

cellent in the first place, Dick. You were afraid I didn't measure up to the Yale standard."

"I suppose it would be awful nervy if we asked you to coach us to-morrow," timidly ventured Dick.

"I shall be delighted," was the cordial response. "By the way, what does your sister think about it? Do I stand any better in her estimation?"

Dick frowned, considered in silence, and answered with the air of a man of the world:

"Of course, she knows she was all wrong. But girls do certainly hate to own up when they have made a bad break, don't they? It is a failing of the sex. I told her that, if she didn't come around here with me and apologize to you, she was a contrary, spiteful little gump."

"Oh, I didn't expect anything like that," hastily spoke up Whitney. "Please give her my regards and tell her that I hope to see her again before I go back to college."

Whatever may have been Stuart's intentions with respect to winning the favor of Miss Sally Ryder, they were thwarted by a telegram received next morning from Mike Morrison:

Have just finished story of how you waded into those holdups. That sounds good enough to me. Guess you must have had plenty of doughnuts. Better report for practice tomorrow.

The exile, called back to his own, whirled his mother about the room in a jubilant waltz, released her to dash upstairs, and hurl sundry clothes into a suit case, and was dashing away to catch a train before she could realize that he was gone from her loving, fluttering care.

Pudge Osterhaus was still dutifully demolishing the Yale rush line by way of showing his loyalty to Alma Mater, and he rejoiced in the tidings that Whitney was returning to play left guard. There was a surprise in store for the mighty Osterhaus. After playing one-half of the first practice game in which the rejuvenated Whitney appeared, the veteran observed between gasps, and both hands were held to the pit of his stomach:

"My stars! I've had enough for to-day. I am getting old and feeble. Say, youngster, I take it all back. I'm the lad that needs the nurse and baby carriage."

"You are not in first-class condition," politely returned the unterrified youth.

"But you are, Whitney."

"It was the pie and doughnuts," very firmly spake the guard. "I knew what I wanted."

In the great game against Harvard, the Yale left guard showed that the effects of the homemade remedy for overtraining had been lasting.

It may be that the singular prowess which distinguished his conduct in this contest was stimulated also by the fact that Miss Sally Ryder was one of the vast throng which sat, not on the Harvard side of the field, but in the midst of the blue flags and ribbons and banners that blossomed innumerably where the Yale cohorts were assembled.

Stuart spied her there while the Yale team was waiting for their foemen to come trotting across the field from the dressing rooms. She was far more adorable in his sight than when he had beheld her at home, and, wonderful to relate, a great bunch of violets was pinned on her coat, and she was flourishing a blue flag with all the enthusiasm in the world.

The game was won by Yale, and Stuart Whitney played a shining part in the victory. Bruised and battered, but happy beyond words, he made haste to escape from the training quarters, dodged the swarm of undergraduate hero worshipers, and fled for the campus on the chance that he might find the fair Sally.

Fortune favored the brave on this great day, and he spied her in company with Dick and a chaperon unknown to him.

With a pretty air of contriteness, Sally Ryder ran impulsively to meet the football guard, and cried as she gave him both her hands:

"I saw the error of my ways, Stuart,

and I wanted to confess before you went back to college, but I was too proud and naughty."

"She ate humble pie by wearing Yale colors to-day," observed young Dick.

"Heavens! Don't apologize to me!" exclaimed the happy hero. "It is just perfectly bully to have you here and helping us to win, Sally."

Stuart laughed, and held up his arms to show the cuffs of his shirt. The buttons were of gold, fashioned in the shape of miniature doughnuts.

"A present from the paper mills company," he explained. "Old Major Robbins is responsible for the design. He swears up and down that if it had not been for wanting mother's doughnuts, I should not have been at home to rescue him, and that if I had not eaten them I should not have been strong and sandy enough to put up a fight."

"It is a deliciously appropriate reward," mirthfully quoth Sally Ryder. Then with a touch of seriousness, she added: "And mother's doughnuts made me a good Yale girl, Stuart, and——"

"And gave us a chance to become good friends. That is worth as much to me as winning the game against Harvard," was the bold assertion of Stuart Whitney, no longer the bashful sophomore.



ANGER AND SECOND THOUGHT

HE was a Southern gentleman, full of honor, anger, and desire for revenge. Fancying that he had been insulted, he thrust a tremendous revolver into his inside breast pocket, and started down the street to kill the miserable wretch who had affronted him. The search for the victim consumed more than an hour, but at last it ended successfully.

"Look here!" said the insulted gentleman, throwing open his coat, and displaying the revolver. "I had every intention of killing you. I would kill you without the slightest regret or compunction. Such a worm as you deserves to die. You merely encumber the earth. I'd kill you in a minute if you could rouse me to such a pitch that I would forget the inconveniences and penalties of the law against murder. But why should I go to prison for the measly privilege of killing a worm? I won't do it."

Then he slapped the offender's face, and went home to dinner.

WORK FOR WHISKY TO DO

IN a Western town, the fight was on for prohibition. At a mass meeting, the advocate of abolishing intoxicating liquors from the municipality wound up his speech with this:

"Look at me! Does any man believe I would be in possession of such a robust physique if I had been a whisky drinker? Is there anything I need? Is there anything whisky could do for me? Is——"

But he was interrupted by a saloon proprietor who sat in the second row.

"It might," he cut in, "stimulate your brain—but I can't say I would be hopeful even of that."

MEDICINE AND MONEY

Robert N. Harper, one of the best-known bankers and business men in the national capital, got his start in life by inventing a headache medicine. What is more to the point, he thinks so much of it that he takes it himself.

The Buhl Cabinet

By Burton E. Stevenson

Author of "The Marathon Mystery," "The Holladay Case," "That Affair at Elizabeth," Etc.

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS.

Returning from a trip abroad, Philip Vantine, a wealthy, middle-aged New Yorker whose hobby is the collecting of rare and beautiful furniture, discovers a magnificent buhl cabinet among some furniture he has brought back. Sending for his lawyer, Lester, he explains that he did not buy the cabinet and that the dealers have evidently shipped it by mistake. But he directs Lester to secure it from them at any price. While he and Lester are at lunch, Parks, the butler, brings Vantine the card of a man who is waiting in the entry to see him. They finish lunch and go downstairs to find the visitor dead before the cabinet. The coroner is notified and arrives at the house with the police and Jim Godfrey, the star reporter of the *Record*, and, incidentally, a close friend of Lester. They discover that the stranger has been killed by some amazingly powerful poison administered through two little cuts on the back of one of his hands. There is nothing to identify the victim but a picture of a woman in his watchcase. A few hours later Vantine himself is found dead in the same spot before the cabinet, apparently killed in the same way as the stranger. Rogers, the under man, says that he admitted a heavily veiled woman some time before the finding of Vantine's body, and that she and Mr. Vantine had gone into the room containing the cabinet together. It is his belief that she was the murderer. He evidently knows more than he will tell. The police are dazed by this second death and fail to establish either motive or means to fit the cases. Lester and Godfrey, however, get together and decide that the mysterious cabinet is in the house as the result of a deep-laid plot and that it contains a terrible death-dealing contrivance. His hand covered with a steel gauntlet, Godfrey attempts to discover the secret. A well-known lawyer calls on Lester in behalf of his fair client, an American heiress married to a profligate French nobleman, and asks permission to secure a packet of compromising letters placed in a secret drawer of the cabinet by his client. The nobleman had owned the cabinet and had sold it without the knowledge of his wife. Lester agrees, and in the presence of Godfrey, Lester, her lawyer, and her maid, the countess opens the secret drawer in the cabinet and gets her letters. To the surprise and relief of all she comes to no harm from any hidden poison. Lester shows her a photograph of the Frenchman killed before the cabinet, but she cannot identify him. When her maid is shown it, however, the girl falls in a faint. At that moment Rogers comes into the room and catching sight of the girl he too drops to the floor unconscious. Lester discovers that the girl is the mysterious visitor of Vantine the night of his murder. She is revived and admits that the dead man was her lover, that he had come to Vantine hoping to be able to secure the letters which he would sell for a price, but had been killed before seeing the American. She had seen Vantine with the same purpose in view, but Vantine had refused to deliver the letters to any one but her mistress, and she had left him alive and in possession of the secret of the cabinet. The mystery of the murders is therefore as great as ever. The following day a Frenchman calls upon Lester, and purporting to be from the firm who had sold the cabinet to Vantine, deplores the error and makes arrangements to send for it the following day.

CHAPTER XVIII.

I PART WITH THE BUHL CABINET.

THE coroner's inquest was held next day, and my surmise proved to be correct. The police had discovered practically no new evidence; none certainly which shed any light on the way in which Drouet and Philip Vantine had met death. Each of the witnesses told his story much as I have told it here; and it was evident enough that the jury was bewildered by the seemingly inextricable tangle of circumstances.

To my relief, Drouet's identity was established without any help from me. The bag which he had left on the pier had been opened at the request of the police, and a cardcase found with his address on it. Why he had sent in to Vantine a card not his own, and what his business with Vantine had been, were details concerning which the police could offer no theory, and which I did not feel called upon to explain, since

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This story began in the first November POPULAR. Back numbers can be obtained through any news dealer.

neither in any way made clearer the mystery of his death.

An amusing incident of the inquest was the attempt made by Goldberger to heckle Godfrey, evidently at Grady's suggestion.

"On the morning after the tragedy, Mr. Godfrey," Goldberger began sweetly, "you printed in the *Record* a photograph which you claimed to be that of the woman who had called upon Mr. Vantine the night before, and who was presumably the last person to see him alive. Where did you get that photograph?"

"It was a copy of one which Drouet carried in his watchcase," answered Godfrey.

"Since then," pursued Goldberger, "you have made no further reference to that feature of the case. I presume you found out that you were mistaken?"

"On the contrary, I proved that I was correct."

Goldberger's face reddened, and his look was not pleasant.

"'Prove' is rather a strong word, isn't it?" he asked.

"It is the right word."

"What was the woman's connection with the man Drouet?"

"He had been her lover."

"You say that very confidently," said Goldberger, his lips curling. "After all, it is merely a guess, isn't it?"

"I have reason to say it confidently," retorted Godfrey quietly, "since the woman confessed as much in my presence."

Again Goldberger reddened.

"I suppose she also confessed that it was really she who called upon Mr. Vantine?" he sneered.

"She not only confessed that," said Godfrey, still more quietly, "but she told in detail what occurred during that visit."

"The confession was made to yourself alone, of course?" queried Goldberger, in a tone almost insulting.

Godfrey flushed a little at the words, but managed to retain his self-control.

"Not at all," he said. "It was made in the presence of Mr. Lester and of another distinguished lawyer, whose name I am not at liberty to reveal."

Goldberger swallowed hard, as though he had received a slap in the face. I dare say he felt as though he had.

"This woman is in New York?" he asked.

"I believe so."

"What is her name and address?"

"I am not at liberty to answer."

Goldberger glared at him.

"You *will* answer," he thundered, "or I'll commit you for contempt!"

Godfrey was quite himself again.

"Very well," he said, smiling. "I have not the slightest objection. But I would think it over, if I were you. Mr. Lester will assure you that the woman was in no way connected with the death of either Drouet or of Mr. Vantine."

Goldberger did think it over. He realized the danger of trying to punish a paper so powerful as the *Record;* and he finally decided to accept Godfrey's statement as a mitigation of his refusal to answer.

"That is only one of the details which Commissioner Grady has missed," Godfrey added pleasantly. "He has made a miserable mess of this case, just as he has of so many others."

"That will do," Goldberger broke in, and Godfrey left the stand.

I was recalled to confirm his story. I also, of course, refused to give the woman's name, explaining to Goldberger that I had learned it professionally, that I was certain she had been guilty of no crime, and that to reveal it would seriously embarrass an entirely innocent woman. With that statement, the coroner was compelled to appear satisfied.

Grady did not go on the stand; he was not even at the inquest. In fact, since the first day, he had not appeared publicly in connection with the case at all; and I had surmised that he had not cared to be identified with a mystery which there seemed to be no prospect of solving, and from which no glory was to be won. The case had been placed in Simmonds' hands, and it was

he who testified on behalf of the police, admitting candidly that they were all at sea.

He had made a careful examination of the Vantine house, he said, particularly of the room in which the bodies had been found, and had discovered absolutely nothing in the shape of a clew to the solution of the mystery. There was something diabolical about it; something almost supernatural. He had not abandoned hope, and was still working on the case; but he was inclined to think that, if the mystery was ever solved, it would be only by some lucky accident or through the confession of the guilty man.

Goldberger was annoyed; that was evident enough from the nervous way in which he gnawed his mustache; but he had no theory any more than the police; there was not a scintilla of evidence to fasten the crime upon any one; and the end of the hearing was that the jury brought in a verdict that Vantine and Drouet had died from the effects of a poison administered by a person or persons unknown.

Godfrey joined me at the door as I was leaving, and we went down the steps together.

"I was glad to hear Simmonds confess that the police are up a tree," he said. "Of course, Grady's trying to sneak out of it, and blame some one else for the failure—but I'll see that he doesn't succeed. I'll see, anyway, that Simmonds gets a square deal. He's an old friend of mine, you know."

"Yes," I said. "I know; but we're all up a tree, aren't we?"

"For the present," laughed Godfrey, "we do occupy that undignified position. But you don't expect to stay there forever, do you, Lester?"

"Since my theory about the buhl cabinet exploded," I said, "I've given up hope. By the way, I'm going to turn the cabinet over to its owner to-morrow."

"To its owner?" he repeated, his eyes narrowing. "Yes, I thought he'd be around for it, though I hardly thought he'd come so soon. Who does he happen to be, Lester?"

"Why," I said, a little impatiently, "you know as well as I do that the cabinet belongs to Armand & Son."

"You've seen their representative, then?" he queried, a little flush of excitement, which I could not understand, spreading over his face.

"He came to see me yesterday. I'd like you to meet him, Godfrey. He is Félix Armand, the 'Son' of the firm, and one of the most finished gentlemen I ever met."

"I'd like to meet him," said Godfrey, smiling queerly. "Perhaps I shall some day. I hope so, anyhow. But how did he explain the blunder, Lester?"

"In some way they shipped the wrong cabinet to Vantine. The right one will get here on *La Provence* to-morrow;" and I told him in detail the story which Félix Armand had told me. "He was quite upset over it," I added. "His apologies were almost abject."

Godfrey listened intently to all this, and he nodded with satisfaction when I had finished.

"It is all most interesting," he commented. "Did Monsieur Armand happen to mention where he is staying?"

"No; but he won't be hard to find if you want to see him. He's at one of the big hotels, of course."

"What time do you expect him to-morrow?"

"Some time in the afternoon. He's to call for me as soon as he gets Vantine's cabinet off the boat. Godfrey," I added, "I felt yesterday when I was talking with him that, perhaps, he knew more about this affair than he would admit. I could see that he guessed in an instant who the owner of the letters was, and what they contained. Do you think I ought to hold on to the cabinet a while longer? I could invent some pretext for delay easily enough."

"Why, no; let him have his cabinet," said Godfrey, with an alacrity that surprised me. "If your theory about it has been exploded, what's the use of hanging on to it?"

"I don't see any use in doing so," I admitted; "but I thought that perhaps

you might want more time to examine it."

"I've examined it all I'm going to," Godfrey answered; and I told myself that this was the first time I had ever known him to admit himself defeated.

"I have a sort of feeling," I explained, "that when we let go of the cabinet, we give up the only clew we have to this whole affair. It's like a confession of defeat."

"Oh, no, it isn't," Godfrey objected. "If there is nothing more to be learned from the cabinet, there's no reason to retain it. I should certainly let Monsieur Armand have it. Perhaps I'll see you to-morrow," he added, and we parted at the corner.

But I did not see him on the morrow. I was rather expecting a call from him during the morning, and, when none came, I was certain I should find him awaiting me when I arrived at the Vantine house in company with Monsieur Armand. But he was not there; and, when I asked for him, Parks told me that he had not seen him since the day before.

I confess that Godfrey's indifference to the fate of the cabinet surprised me greatly; besides, I was hoping that he would wish to meet the fascinating Frenchman—more fascinating, if possible, to-day than he had been the day before.

There had been less delay than he had anticipated in getting the cabinet off the boat and through the customs; and it was not yet three o'clock when we reached the Vantine house.

"I haven't seen Mr. Godfrey," Parks repeated; "but there's others here as it fair breaks my heart to see."

He motioned toward the door of the music room; and, stepping to it, I saw that the inventory was already in progress. The man in charge of it nodded to me; but I did not go in, for the sight was an anything but pleasant one.

"The cabinet is in the room across the hall," I said to Monsieur Armand, and led the way through the anteroom into the room beyond.

Parks switched on the lights for us; and my companion glanced with surprise at the heavy shutters covering the windows.

"We put those up for a protection," I explained. "We had an idea that some one would try to enter. In fact, one evening we *did* find a wire connecting with the burglar alarm cut; and, later on, saw some one peering in through the hole in that shutter yonder."

"You did?" Monsieur Armand queried quickly. "Would you recognize the man if you were to meet him again?"

"Oh, no; you see the hole is quite small. There was nothing visible except a pair of eyes. Yet I might know them again, for I never before saw such eyes—so bright, so burning. It was the night that Godfrey and I were trying to find the secret drawer, and those eyes gleamed like fire as they watched us."

Monsieur Armand was gazing at the cabinet, apparently only half listening.

"Ah, yes; the secret drawer," he said. "Will you show me how it is operated, Mr. Lester? I am most curious about it."

I placed my hand upon the table and pressed the three points which the veiled lady had shown us. The first time I got the order wrong; but at the second trial, the little handle fell forward with a click, and I pulled the drawer open.

"There it is," I said. "You see how cleverly it is constructed, and how well it is concealed. No one would suspect its existence."

He examined it with much interest; pushed it back into place, and then opened it himself.

"Very clever indeed," he agreed. "I have never seen another so well concealed. And the idea of opening it only by a certain combination is most happy and original. Most secret drawers are secret only in name; a slight search reveals them; but this one——"

He pushed it shut again, and examined the inlay around it.

"My friend and I went over the cabinet very carefully, and could not find it," I said.

"Your friend—I think you mentioned his name?"

"Yes. His name is Godfrey."

"A man of the law, like yourself?"

"Oh, no; a newspaper man. But he had been a member of the detective force before that. He is extraordinarily keen; and if anybody could have found that drawer he could. But that combination was too much for him."

Monsieur Armand snapped the drawer back into place with a little crash.

"I am glad, at any rate, that it *was* discovered," he said. "I will not conceal from you, Mr. Lester, that it adds not a little to the value of the cabinet."

"What *is* its value?" I asked. "Mr. Vantine wanted me to buy it for him, and named a most extravagant figure as the limit he was willing to pay."

"Really," Monsieur Armand answered, after an instant's hesitation, "I would not care to name a figure, Mr. Lester, without further consultation with my father. The cabinet is quite unique—the most beautiful, perhaps, that Monsieur Boulle ever produced. Did you discover Madame De Montespan's monogram?"

"No. Mr. Vantine said he was sure it existed; but Godfrey and I did not look for it."

Monsieur Armand opened the doors which concealed the central drawers.

"Voilà!" he said, and traced with his finger the arabesque just under the pediment. "See how cunningly it has been blended with the other figures. And here is the emblem of the giver." He pointed to a tiny golden sun, with radiating rays on the base of the pediment, just above the monogram. *"Le roi soleil!"*

"Le roi soleil!" I repeated. "Of course. We were stupid not to have discerned it. That tells the whole story, doesn't it? What is it, Parks?" I added, as that worthy appeared at the door.

"There's a van outside, sir," he said, "and a couple of men are unloading a piece of furniture. Is it all right, sir?"

"Yes," I answered. "Have them bring it in here. And ask the man in charge of the inventory to step over here a minute. Mr. Vantine left his collection of art objects to the Metropolitan Museum," I explained to Monsieur Armand, "and I should like the representative of the museum to be present when the exchange is made."

"Certainly," he assented. "That is very just."

Parks was back in a moment, piloting two men, who carried between them an object swathed in burlap; and the Metropolitan man followed them in.

"I am Mr. Lester," I said to him, "Mr. Vantine's executor; and this is Monsieur Félix Armand, of Armand & Son, of Paris. We are correcting an error which was made just before Mr. Vantine died. That cabinet yonder was shipped him by mistake in place of one which he had bought. Monsieur Armand has caused the right one to be sent over, and will take away the one which belongs to him. I have already spoken to the museum's attorney about the matter; but I wished you to be present when the exchange was made."

"I've no doubt it is all right, sir," the museum man hastened to assure me. "You, of course, have personal knowledge of all this?"

"Certainly. Mr. Vantine himself told me the story."

"Very well, sir;" but his eyes dwelt lovingly upon the buhl cabinet. "That is a very handsome piece," he added. "I am sorry the museum is not to get it."

"Perhaps you can buy it from Monsieur Armand," I suggested; but the curator laughed and shook his head.

"No," he said, "we couldn't afford it. But our director, Mr. Robinson, might persuade Mr. Morgan to buy it for us. I'll mention it to him."

The two men, meanwhile, under Monsieur Armand's direction, had been stripping the wrappings from the other cabinet, and it finally stood revealed. It, too, was a beautiful piece of furniture; but even my untrained eye could see how greatly it fell below the other.

"We shall be very pleased to have Mr. Morgan see it," said Monsieur Armand, with a smile. "I will not conceal from you that we had already thought

of him—as what dealer does not when he acquires something rare and beautiful? I shall endeavor to secure an appointment with him. Meanwhile——"

"Meanwhile the cabinet is yours," I said.

He made a little deprecating gesture, and then proceeded to have the cabinet very carefully wrapped in the burlap which had been around the other one. I watched it disappear under the rough covering with something like regret, for already my eyes were being opened to its beauty. Besides, I told myself again, with it would disappear the last chance of solving the mystery of Philip Vantine's death. However my reason might protest, some instinct told me that, in some way, the buhl cabinet was connected with that tragedy.

But at last the packing was done, and Monsieur Armand turned to me and held out his hand.

"I shall hope to see you again, Mr. Lester," he said, with a cordiality which flattered me, "and to renew our very pleasant acquaintance. Whenever you are in Paris, I trust you will not fail to honor me by letting me know. I shall count it a very great privilege to display for you some of the beauties of our city not known to every one."

"Thank you," I said. "I shall certainly remember that invitation. And meanwhile, since you are here in New York——"

"You are most kind," he broke in; "and I was myself hoping that we might at least dine together. But I am compelled to proceed to Boston this evening, and from there I will go on to Quebec. Whether I shall get back to New York I do not know. It will depend somewhat upon Mr. Morgan's attitude. We would scarcely intrust a business so delicate to our dealer. If I do get back, I shall certainly let you know."

"Please do," I urged. "It will be a very great pleasure to me. Besides, I am still hoping that some solution of this mystery may occur to you."

He shook his head with a little smile.

"I fear it is too difficult for an amateur like myself," he said. "It is impenetrable to me. If a solution is discovered, I trust you will let me know. It is certain to be most interesting."

"I will," I promised, and we shook hands again.

Then he signed to the two men to take up the cabinet, and himself laid a protecting hand upon it as it was carried through the door and down the steps to the van which was backed up to the curb. It was lifted carefully inside, the two men clambered in beside it, the driver spoke to the horses, and the van rolled slowly away up the avenue.

Monsieur Armand watched it for a moment, then mounted into the cab which was waiting, waved a last farewell to me, and followed after the van. We watched it until it turned westward at the first cross street.

"Mr. Godfrey's occupation will be gone," said Parks, with a little laugh. "He has fairly lived with that cabinet for the past three or four days. He was here last night for quite a while."

"Last night?" I echoed, surprised. "I was sure he would be here to-day," I added, reflecting that Godfrey might have decided to have a final look at the cabinet. "He half promised to be here; but I suppose something more important detained him."

The next instant, I was jumping down the steps two at a time, for a cab in which two men were sitting came down the avenue, and rolled slowly around the corner in the direction taken by the van.

And, just as it disappeared, one of its occupants turned toward me and waved his hand—and I recognized Jim Godfrey.

CHAPTER XIX.

BEHIND THE LOCKED DOOR.

That my legs, without conscious effort of my own, should carry me up the avenue and around the corner after the cab in which I had seen Godfrey was a foregone conclusion; and yet it was with a certain vexation of spirit that I found myself racing along, for I realized that Godfrey had not been entirely frank with me.

Certainly he had dropped no hint of his intention to follow Armand; but, I told myself, that might very well have been because he deemed such a hint unnecessary. I might have guessed, in spite of his seeming unconcern, that he would not allow the cabinet to pass from his sight. If he had been willing for me to turn it over to Armand, it was only because he expected developments of some sort to follow that transfer.

And it suddenly dawned upon me that even I did not know the cabinet's destination. It had not occurred to me to inquire where Monsieur Armand proposed to take it, and he had volunteered no information.

So, after a moment, I took up the chase more contentedly, telling myself that Godfrey would not have waved to me if he had not wanted me along; and I reached the corner in time to see the van turn northward into Sixth Avenue. As soon as it and the cabs which followed it were out of sight, I sprinted along the sidewalk at top speed; and, on arriving at the corner, had the satisfaction of seeing them only a little way ahead.

Here the congestion of traffic was such that the van could proceed but slowly; and I had no difficulty in keeping pace with it without the necessity of making myself conspicuous by running. Indeed, I rather hung back, burying myself in the crowd on the sidewalk, for fear that Armand might chance to glance around and see me in pursuit.

I saw that Godfrey and Simmonds had the same fear, for the cab in which they were drew up at the curb, and waited there until the van had got some distance ahead. At Thirteenth Street, it turned westward again, and then northward into Seventh Avenue.

What could Armand be doing in this part of the town, I asked myself? Did he propose to leave that priceless cabinet in this dingy quarter? And then I paused abruptly, and slipped into an areaway, for the van had stopped some distance ahead, and was backing up to the curb.

Looking out discreetly, I saw the cab containing Armand stop also; and that gentleman alighted and paid the driver. The other cab rattled on at a good pace and disappeared up the avenue. Then the two porters lifted out the cabinet, and, with Armand showing them the way, carried it into the building before which the van had stopped.

They were gone perhaps five minutes, from which I argued that they were carrying it upstairs. Then they reappeared, with Armand accompanying them. He tipped them, and went out also to tip the driver of the van. Then the three men climbed aboard, and it rattled away out of sight. Armand stood for a moment on the step, looking up and down the avenue, then disappeared indoors.

An instant later, I saw Godfrey and another man whom I recognized as Simmonds, come out of a shop across the street and dash over to the house into which the cabinet had been taken. They were standing on the doorstep when I joined them, and Godfrey greeted me with the merest nod.

It was a dingy building, entirely typical of the dingy neighborhood. The ground floor was occupied by a laundry, which the sign on the front window declared to be French; and the room which the window lighted extended the whole width of the building, except for a door which opened presumably on the stairway leading to the upper stories.

Godfrey's face was flaming with excitement as he turned the knob of this door gently—gently. The door was locked. He stooped, and applied an eye to the keyhole.

"The key is in the lock," he whispered. "Have you got your pliers?"

For answer, Simmonds took from his pocket a pair of slender pliers and passed them over.

Godfrey looked up and down the street, saw that for the moment there was no one near, inserted the pliers in the keyhole, grasped the end of the key, and turned it slowly.

"Now!" he said, and softly opened the door and slipped inside. I followed. Simmonds came after me like a shad-

ow, closing the door carefully behind him.

Then we all stopped, and my heart, at least, was in my mouth, for, from somewhere overhead, came the sound of a man's voice, talking excitedly.

Even in the semidarkness, I could see the look of astonishment and alarm on Godfrey's face, as he stood for a moment motionless, listening to that voice. I also stood with ears astrain; but I could make nothing of what it was saying; then suddenly I realized that it was speaking in French. And yet it was not Armand's voice—of that I was certain.

Fronting us was a narrow stair mounting steeply to the story overhead; and, after that moment's amazed hesitation, Godfrey sat down on the bottom step and removed his shoes, motioning us to do the same. Simmonds obeyed phlegmatically; but my hands were trembling so with excitement that I was in mortal terror lest I drop one of my shoes; but I managed to get them both off without mishap.

When at last I looked up with a sigh of relief, Godfrey and Simmonds were stealing slowly up the stair, revolver in hand. I followed them; but I confess my knees were knocking together, for there was something weird and chilling in that voice going on and on. It sounded like the voice of a madman. There was something about it at once ferocious and triumphant——

Godfrey paused an instant at the stairhead, listening intently. Then he moved cautiously forward toward an open door from which the voice seemed to come, motioning us at the same time to stay where we were. And as I knelt there, bathed in perspiration, I caught one word, repeated over and over:

"*Revanche! Revanche! Revanche!*"

Then the voice fell suddenly to a sort of low growling, as of a dog which worries its prey; and I caught a sound as of ripping cloth.

Godfrey, on hands and knees, was peering into the room. Then he drew back and motioned us forward.

I shall never forget the sight which met my eyes as I peered around the corner of the door.

The room into which I was looking was lighted only by the rays which filtered between the slats of a closed shutter. In the middle of the floor stood the buhl cabinet; and before it, with his back to the door, stood a man, ripping savagely away the strips of burlap in which it had been wrapped, talking to himself the while in a sort of savage singsong, and pausing from moment to moment to glance at a sort of bundle lying on the floor against the opposite wall.

For a time, I could not make out what this bundle was; then, straining my eyes, I saw that it was the body of a man.

And, as I stared at him, I caught the glitter of his eyes as he watched the man working at the cabinet—a glitter not to be mistaken—the same glitter which had so frightened me once before——

Godfrey drew me back with a firm hand and took my place. As for me, I retreated to the stairs, and sat there feverishly mopping my face and trying to understand. Who was this man? What was he doing there against the wall? What was the meaning of this ferocious scene——

Then my heart leaped into my throat, for Godfrey, with a sharp cry of "*Halte-la!*" sprang to his feet and dashed into the room, Simmonds at his heels.

I suppose two seconds elapsed before I reached the threshold; and I stopped there, staring, clutching at the door to steady myself.

That scene is so photographed upon my brain that I have only to close my eyes to see it again in every detail.

There was the cabinet, with its wrappings torn away; but the figure on the floor had disappeared; and before an open doorway into another room stood a man, a giant of a man, his hands above his head, his face working with fear and rage; while Godfrey, his lips curling into a mocking smile, pressed a pistol against his breast.

Then, as I stood there, staring, it

seemed to me that there was a sort of flicker in the air above the man's head, and he screamed shrilly.

"La mort!" he shrieked. *"La mort!"*

For one dreadful instant longer he stood there motionless, his hands still held aloft, his eyes staring horribly; then, with a strangled cry, he pitched forward heavily at Godfrey's feet.

CHAPTER XX.

THE ESCAPE.

I have a confused remembrance of Godfrey stooping for an instant above the body, staring at it, and then, with a sharp cry, hurling himself through that open doorway. A door slammed somewhere, there was a sound of running feet, and, before either Simmonds or myself understood what was happening, Godfrey was back in the room, crossed it at a bound, and dashed to the door opening into the hall just as it was slammed in his face.

I saw him tear desperately at the knob, then retreat two steps, and hurl himself against it. But it held firm; and from the hall outside came a burst of mocking laughter that fairly froze my blood.

"Come here, you fools!" cried Godfrey between clenched teeth. "Don't you see he's getting away!"

Simmonds was quicker than I; and together they threw themselves at the door. It cracked ominously, but still held. Again they tried, and this time it split from top to bottom. Godfrey kicked the pieces to one side and slipped between them, Simmonds after him.

Then, in a sort of trance, I staggered to it; and, after a moment's aimless fumbling, was out in the hall again. I reached the stairhead in time to see Godfrey try the front door, and then turn along the lower hall leading to the back of the house. An instant later, a chorus of frenzied women's shrieks made my hair stand on end.

How I got down the stair I do not know; but I, too, turned back along the lower hall, expecting any instant to come upon I knew not what horror. I reached an open door, passed through it, and found myself in the laundry, in the midst of a group of excited and indignant women, who greeted my appearance with a fresh series of screams.

Unable to go farther, I sat limply down upon a box and looked at them.

I dare say the figure I made was ridiculous enough, for the screams gave place to subdued giggles; but I was far from thinking of my appearance, or caring what impression I produced. And I was still sitting there when Godfrey came back, breathing heavily, chagrin and anger in his eyes. The employees of the laundry, conscious that something extraordinary was occurring, crowded about him; but he elbowed his way through them to the desk where the manager sat.

"A crime has been committed upstairs," he said. "This gentleman with me is Mr. Simmonds, of the detective bureau;" and at the words Simmonds showed his shield. "We'll have to notify headquarters," Godfrey went on; "and I'd advise that you keep your girls at their work. I don't suppose you want to be mixed up in it."

"Sure not," agreed the manager promptly; and, while Simmonds went to the phone and called up police headquarters, the manager dismounted from his throne, went down among the girls, and had them back at their work in short order.

Godfrey came over to me and laid a hand on my shoulder.

"Why, Lester," he said, "you look as though you were at your last gasp!"

"I'm feeling the same way," I said. "I'm going to have nervous prostration if this thing keeps up. You're not looking particularly happy yourself."

"I'm not happy. I've let that fellow kill a man right under my nose—literally under my nose—and then get away!"

"Kill a man?" I repeated. "Do you mean——"

"Go upstairs and look at the right hand of the man lying there," said Godfrey curtly, "and you'll see what I mean."

I sat staring at him, unable to believe that I had heard aright; unable to be-

lieve that Godfrey had really uttered those words—the right hand of the man lying there—that could mean only one thing——

Simmonds joined us with a twisted smile on his lips; and I saw that even he was a little shaken.

"I got Grady," he said, "and told him what had happened. He says he's too busy to come up, and that I'm to take charge of things."

Godfrey laughed a little mocking laugh.

"Grady foresees his Waterloo!" he said. "Well, it's not far distant. But I'm glad for your sake, Simmonds. You're going to get some glory out of this thing yet."

"I hope so;" and Simmonds' eyes gleamed an instant. "The ambulance will be around at once," he added. "We'd better get our shoes on and go back upstairs, and see if anything can be done for that fellow."

"There can't anything be done for him," said Godfrey wearily; "but we'd better have a look at him, I guess;" and he led the way out into the hall.

Not until Simmonds spoke did I remember that I was shoeless. Now I sat down beside Godfrey, got fumblingly into my shoes again, and then followed him and Simmonds slowly up the stair.

I thought I knew what was passing in Godfrey's mind—he was blaming himself for this latest tragedy. He was telling himself that he should have foreseen and prevented it. He always blamed himself in that way when things went wrong—and then to have the murderer slip through his very fingers! I could guess what a mighty shock that had been to his self-confidence.

The latest victim was lying where he had fallen, just inside the doorway leading into the inner room. Simmonds stepped to the window, threw open the shutters, and let a flood of afternoon sunshine into the room. Then he knelt beside the body, and held up the limp right hand for us to see.

Just above the knuckles were two tiny incisions, with a drop or two of blood oozing away from them, and the flesh about them swollen and discolored.

"I knew what it was the instant he yelled *'La mort!'*" said Godfrey quietly. "And *he* knew what it was the instant he felt the stroke. It is evident enough that he had seen it used before, or heard of it, and knew that it meant instant death."

I sat down, staring at the dead man, and tried to collect my senses. So this fiendish criminal, who slew with poison, had been lurking in Vantine's house, and had struck down first Drouet and then the master of the house himself. But why—why? It was incredible, astounding. My brain reeled at the thought. And yet it must be true.

I looked again at the third victim, and saw a man roughly dressed, with bushy black hair and a tangled beard; a very giant of a man, whose physical strength must have been enormous—and yet it had availed him nothing against that tiny pin prick on the hand.

And then a sudden thought brought me bolt upright.

"But Armand!" I cried. "Where is Armand?"

Godfrey looked at me with a half-pitying smile.

"What, Lester!" he said. "Don't you understand even yet? It was your fascinating Monsieur Armand who did that;" and he pointed to the dead man.

I felt as though I had been struck a heavy blow upon the head. Black circles whirled before my eyes——

"Go over to the window," said Godfrey peremptorily, "and get some fresh air."

Mechanically I obeyed, and stood clinging to the window sill, gazing down at the busy street, where the tide of humanity was flowing up and down, all unconscious of the tragedy which had been enacted so close at hand. And at last, the calmness of all these people, the sight of the world going quietly on as usual, restored me a portion of my self-control. But even yet I did not understand.

"Was it Armand," I asked, turning back into the room, "who lay there in the corner?"

"Certainly it was," Godfrey answered. "Who else could it be?"

"Godfrey!" I cried, remembering suddenly. "Did you see his eyes as he lay there watching the man at the cabinet?"

"Yes. I saw them."

"They were the same eyes——"

"The same eyes."

"And the laugh—did you hear that laugh?"

"Certainly I heard it."

"I heard it once before," I said; "and you thought it was a case of nerves."

I fell silent a moment, shivering a little at the remembrance.

"But why did Armand lie there so quietly in the corner?" I asked, at last. "Was he injured?"

Godfrey made a little gesture toward the corner.

"Go see for yourself," he said.

Something still lay along the wall on the spot where I had seen that figure; and, as I bent over it, I saw that it was a large net, finely meshed but very strong.

"That was dropped over Armand's head as he came up the stairs," said Godfrey, "or flung over him as he came into the room. Then the dead man yonder jumped upon him and trussed him up with those ropes."

Pushing the net aside, I saw upon the floor a little pile of severed cords.

"Yes," I agreed, "he would be able to do that. Have you noticed his size, Godfrey? He must have been a giant!"

"He couldn't have done it if Armand hadn't been willing that he should," retorted Godfrey curtly. "You see he had no difficulty in getting away;" and he held up the net and pointed to the great rents in it. "He cut his way out while he was lying there. I ought to have known—I ought to have known he wasn't bound—that he was only waiting—but it was all so sudden!"

He threw the net down upon the floor with a gesture of disgust and despair. Then he stopped in front of the buhl cabinet, and looked down at it musingly; and, after a moment, his face brightened.

The burlap wrappings had been almost wholly torn away; and the cabinet stood, more insolently beautiful than ever, it seemed to me, under the rays of the sun, which sparkled and glittered and shimmered as they fell upon it.

"But we'll get him, Simmonds," said Godfrey, and his lips broke into a smile. "In fact, we've got him now. We have only to wait, and he'll walk into our arms. Simmonds, I want you to lock this cabinet up in the strongest cell around at your station, and carry the key yourself."

"Lock it up?" stammered Simmonds, staring at him.

"Yes," said Godfrey, "lock it up. That's our one salvation." His face was glowing. He was quite himself again; alert, confident of victory. "You're in charge of this case, aren't you? Well, lock it up, and give your reasons to nobody."

"That'll be easy," laughed Simmonds. "I haven't got any reasons."

"Oh, yes, you have;" and Godfrey bent upon him a gaze that was positively hypnotic. "You'll do it because I want you to, and because I tell you that, sooner or later, if you keep this cabinet safe where no one can get at it, the man we want will walk into our hands. And I'll tell you more than that, Simmonds. If we do get him, I'll have the biggest story I ever had, and you'll be world famous. France will make you a chevalier of the Legion of Honor, Simmonds, mark my words. Don't you think the ribbon would look well in your buttonhole?"

Simmonds was staring at the speaker as though he thought he had suddenly gone mad. Indeed, the thought flashed through my own brain that the disappointment, the chagrin of failure, had been too much for Godfrey.

He burst into laughter as he saw our faces.

"No, I'm not mad," he said more soberly; "and I'm not joking. I'm speaking in deadly earnest, Simmonds, when I say that this fellow is the biggest catch we could make. He's the greatest criminal of modern times. I repeat it, Lester, this time without qualification.

And now, perhaps, you'll agree with me."

And with Armand, so finished, so self-poised, so distinguished, in my mind, and the body of his latest victim before my eyes, I nodded gloomily.

"But who is he?" I asked. "Do you know who he is, Godfrey?"

"There's the ambulance," broke in Simmonds, as a knock came at the street door and he hurried down to open it.

"Come on, Lester;" and Godfrey hooked his arm through mine. "There's nothing more we can do here. We'll go down the back way. I've had enough excitement for the time being. Haven't you?"

"I certainly have," I agreed; and he led the way back along the hall to another stair, down it, and so out through the laundry.

"But, Godfrey, who is this man?" I repeated. "Why did he kill that poor fellow up there? Why did he kill Drouet and Vantine? How did he get into the Vantine house? What is it all about?"

"Ah!" he said, looking at me with a smile. "That is the important question. What is it all about! But we can't discuss it here in the street. Besides, I want to think it over, Lester; and I want you to think it over. If I can, I'll drop in to-night to see you, and we can thrash it out. Will that suit you?"

"Yes," I said; "and, for Heaven's sake, don't fail to come!"

CHAPTER XXI.

GODFREY WEAVES A ROMANCE.

I had begun to fear that Godfrey was going to disappoint me, so late it was before his welcome knock came at my door that night. I hastened to let him in; and I could tell by the sigh of relief with which he sank into a chair that he was thoroughly weary.

"It does me good to come in here occasionally and have a talk with you, Lester," he said, accepting the cigar I offered him. "I find it restful after a hard day;" and he smiled across at me good-humoredly.

"How you keep it up I don't see," I said. "This one case has nearly given me nervous prostration."

"Well, I don't often strike one as strenuous as this;" and he settled back comfortably. "As a matter of fact, I haven't had one for a long time that even touches it. There is nothing that's really mysterious about most crimes."

"This one is certainly mysterious enough," I remarked.

"What makes it mysterious," Godfrey explained, "is the apparent lack of motive. As soon as one learns the motive for a crime, one learns also who committed it. But where the motive can't be discovered, it's mighty hard to make any progress."

"It isn't only lack of motive which makes it mysterious," I commented; "it's everything about it. I can't understand, either, why it was done or how it was done. When I get to thinking about it, I feel as though I were wandering about in a maze from which I can never escape."

"Oh, yes, you'll escape, Lester," said Godfrey quietly; "and that before very long."

"If you have an explanation, Godfrey," I protested, "for Heaven's sake tell me! Don't keep me in the maze an instant longer than is necessary. I've been thinking about it till my brain feels like a snarl of tangled thread. Do you mean to say you know what it is all about?"

"'Know' is perhaps a little strong. There isn't much in this world that we really know. Suppose we say that I strongly suspect." He paused a moment, his eyes on the ceiling. "You know you've accused me of romancing sometimes, Lester—the other evening, for instance; yet that romance has come true."

"I take it all back," I said meekly.

"There's another thing these talks do," continued Godfrey, going off rather at a tangent, "and that is to clarify my ideas. You don't know how it helps me to state my case to you and to try to answer your objections. Your being a lawyer makes you unusually quick to see objections; and a lawyer is al-

ways harder to convince of a thing than the ordinary man. You are accustomed to weighing evidence; and so I never allow myself to be convinced of a theory until I've convinced you. Not always even then," he added, with a smile.

"Well, I'm glad I'm of some use," I said, "if it is only as a sort of file for you to sharpen your wits on. So please go ahead and romance some more. Tell me first how you and Simmonds came to be following Armand?"

"Simply because I had found out he wasn't Armand. Monsieur Félix Armand is in Paris at this moment. You were too credulous, Lester."

"Why, I never had any doubt of his being Armand," I stammered. "He knew about my cablegram. He knew about the firm's answer——"

"Of course he did, because your cable was never received by the Armands, but by a confederate in this fellow's employ; and it was that confederate who answered it. Our friend, the unknown, foresaw, of course, that a cable would be sent the Armands as soon as the mistake was discovered, and he took his precautions accordingly."

"Then you still believe that the cabinet was sent to Vantine by design and not by accident?"

"Absolutely. It was sent by the Armands in good faith, because they believed that it had been purchased by Vantine—all of which had been arranged very carefully by the great unknown."

"Tell me how you know all this, Godfrey," I said.

"Why, it was easy enough. When you told me yesterday of Armand, I knew, or thought I knew, that it was a plant of some kind. But, in order to be sure, I cabled our man at Paris to investigate. Our man went at once to Armand, Senior, and he learned a number of very interesting things. One was that the son, Félix Armand, was in Paris; another was that no member of the firm knew anything about your cable or the answer to it; a third was that, had the cable been received, it would not have been understood, because the Armands' books show that this cabinet was bought by Philip Vantine for the sum of twelve thousand francs."

"Not this one!" I protested.

"Yes; this one."

"But I don't understand!" I stammered. "Vantine told me himself that he did not buy that cabinet."

"Nor did he. But somebody bought it in his name, and directed that it be sent forward to him."

"And paid twelve thousand francs for it?"

"Certainly—and paid twelve thousand francs to the Armands."

"Rather an expensive present," I said feebly, for my brain was beginning to whirl again.

"Oh, it wasn't intended as a present. The purchaser planned to reclaim it; but Vantine's death threw him out. If it hadn't been for that—for an accident which no one could foresee—everything would have gone along smoothly, and no one would ever have been the wiser."

"But what was his object? Was he trying to evade the duty?"

"Oh, nothing so small as that! Besides, he would have had to refund the duty to Vantine. Did he refund it to you?"

"No," I said, "I didn't think there was any to refund. Vantine really paid the duty only on the cabinet he purchased, since that was the one shown on his manifest. The other fellow must have paid the duty on the cabinet he brought in; so I didn't see that there was anything coming to Vantine's estate. There's probably something due the government, for the cabinet Vantine brought in was, of course, much more valuable than his manifest showed."

"No doubt of that; and the other cabinet is the one which Vantine really purchased. It was, of course, sent forward to this other fellow's address here in New York. His plan is evident enough—to call upon Vantine, as the representative of the Armands, or perhaps as the owner of the Montespan cabinet, and make the exchange. Vantine's death spoiled that, and he had to

make the exchange through you. Even then, he would have been able to pull it off but for the fact that Vantine's death and that of Drouet had called our attention to the cabinet. We followed him, and the incidents of this afternoon followed."

"And he accomplished all this by means of a confederate in the employ of the Armands?"

"No doubt of it. The clerk who made the supposed sale to Vantine and got a commission on it, resigned suddenly two days ago—just as soon as he had intercepted your cable and answered it. The Paris police are looking for him, but I doubt if they'll find him."

I paused to think this over; and then a sudden impatience seized me.

"That's all clear enough," I said. "The cabinets might have been exchanged just as you say they were—no doubt you are right—but all that doesn't lead us anywhere. Why were they exchanged? What is there about that buhl cabinet which makes this unknown willing to do murder for it? Does he think those letters are still in it?"

"He knows they're not in it now. You told him. Before that, he knew nothing about the letters. If he'd known of them, he'd have had them out before the cabinet was shipped."

"What is it, then?" I demanded. "And, above all, Godfrey, why should this fellow hide himself in Vantine's house and kill two men? Did they surprise him while he was working over the cabinet?"

"I see no reason to believe that he was ever inside the Vantine house," said Godfrey quietly; "that is, until you took him there yourself this afternoon."

"But, look here, Godfrey," I protested, "that's nonsense. He must have been in the house, or he couldn't have killed Vantine and Drouet."

"Who said he killed them?"

"If he didn't kill them, who did?"

Godfrey took two or three contemplative puffs, while I sat there staring at him.

"Well," Godfrey answered, at last, "now I'm going to romance a little. We will return to your fascinating friend, Armand, as we may as well call him for the present. He is extraordinary."

"No doubt of it," I agreed.

"I can only repeat what I have said before. In my opinion, he is the greatest criminal of modern times."

"If he is a criminal at all, he is undoubtedly a great one," I conceded. "But it's hard for me to believe that he is a criminal. He's the most cultured man I ever met."

"Of course he is. That's why he's so dangerous. An ignorant criminal is never dangerous—it's the ignorant criminals who fill the prisons. But look out for the educated, accomplished ones. It takes brains to be a great criminal, Lester, and brains of a high order."

"But why should a man with brains be a criminal?" I queried. "If he can earn an honest living, why should he be dishonest?"

"In the first place, most criminals are criminals from choice, not from necessity; and with a cultured man, the incentive is usually the excitement of it. Have you ever thought what an exciting game it is, Lester, to defy society, to break the law, to know that the odds against you are a thousand to one, and yet to come out triumphant? And then, I suppose, every great criminal is a little insane."

"No doubt of it," I agreed.

"Just as every absolutely honest man is a little insane," went on Godfrey quickly. "Just as every great reformer and enthusiast is a little insane. The sane men are the average ones; who are fairly honest and yet tell white lies on occasion; who succumb to temptation now and then; who temporize and compromise, and try to lead a comfortable and quiet life. I repeat, Lester, that this fellow is a great criminal, and that he finds life infinitely more engrossing than either you or I. I hope I'll meet him some time—not in a little skirmish like this, but in an out-and-out battle. Of course, I'd be routed—horse, foot, and dragoons; but it certainly would be interesting;" and he looked at me, his eyes glowing.

"It certainly would," I agreed. "Go ahead with your romance."

"Here it is: This Monsieur Armand is a great criminal, and has, of course, various followers upon whom he must rely for the performance of certain details, since he can be in but one place at a time. Abject and absolute obedience is necessary to his success; and he compels obedience in the only way in which it can be compelled among criminals—by fear. For disobedience, there is only one punishment—death. And the manner of the death is so certain and so mysterious as to be almost supernatural. The deserters and traitors have died, inevitably and invariably, from the effects of an insignificant wound on the right hand, just above the knuckles."

I was listening intently now, as you may well believe, for I began to see whither the romance was tending.

"It is by this secret," Godfrey continued, "that Armand preserves his absolute supremacy. But occasionally the temptation is too great, and one of his men deserts. Armand sends this cabinet to America. He knows that in this case the temptation is very great indeed. He fears treachery, and he arranges in it a mechanism which will inflict death upon the traitor in precisely the same way in which he himself inflicts it—by means of a poisoned stab in the right hand. Imagine the effect upon his gang. He is nowhere near when the act of treachery is performed; and yet the traitor dies instantly and surely. Why, it was a tremendous idea! And it was carried out with absolute genius."

"But," I questioned, "what act of treachery was it that Armand feared?"

"The opening of the secret drawer."

"Then you still believe in the poisoned mechanism?"

"I certainly do. The tragedy of this afternoon proves the truth of the theory."

"I don't see it," I said helplessly.

"Why, Lester," protested Godfrey, "it's as plain as day. Who was that bearded giant who was killed? The traitor, of course. We will find that he was a member of Armand's gang. He followed Armand to America, lay in wait for him, caught him in the net, and bound him hand and foot. Do you suppose for an instant that Armand was ignorant of his presence in that house? Do you suppose he would have been able to take Armand prisoner if Armand had not been willing that he should?"

"I don't see how Armand could help himself after that fellow got his hands on him."

"You don't? And yet you yourself saw that he was not really bound—that he had cut himself loose."

"That is true," I said thoughtfully.

"Let us reconstruct the story," Godfrey went on rapidly. "The traitor knows the secret of the cabinet. He follows Armand to New York, shadows him to the house on Seventh Avenue, waits for him there, and seizes and binds him. He is half mad with triumph. He chants a crazy singsong about revenge, revenge, revenge! And, in order that the triumph may be complete, he does not kill his prisoner at once. He rolls him into a corner and proceeds to rip away the burlap. His triumph will be to open the secret drawer before Armand's eyes. And Armand lies there in the corner, his eyes gleaming, because it is really the moment of *his* triumph which is at hand."

"The moment of his triumph?" I repeated. "What do you mean by that, Godfrey?"

"I mean that, the instant the traitor opened the drawer, he would be stabbed by the poisoned mechanism. It was for that that Armand waited."

I lay back in my chair with a gasp of amazement and admiration. I had been blind not to see it. Armand had merely to lie still and permit the traitor to walk into the trap prepared for him. No wonder his eyes had glowed as he lay there watching that frenzied figure at the cabinet!

"It was not until the last moment," Godfrey went on, "when the traitor was bending above the cabinet feeling for the spring, that I realized what was about to happen. There was no time for hesitation. I sprang into the room. Armand vanished in an instant; and the giant also tried to escape; but I caught

him at the door. I had no idea of his danger. I had no thought that Armand would dare linger. And yet he did. Now that it is too late, I understand. He had to kill that man. There were no two ways about it. Whatever the risk, he had to kill him."

"But why?" I asked. "Why?"

"To seal his lips. If we had captured him, do you suppose Armand's secret would have been safe for an instant? So he had to kill him—he had to kill him with the poisoned barb—and he *did* kill him, and got away into the bargain. Never in my life have I felt so like a fool as when that door was slammed in my face."

"Perhaps he had that prepared, too," I suggested timidly, ready to believe anything of this extraordinary man. "Perhaps he knew that we were there all the time."

"Of course he did," assented Godfrey grimly. "Why else would there be a snap lock on the outside of the door? And to think I didn't see it! To think that I was fool enough to suppose that I could follow him about the streets of New York without his knowing it! He knew from the first that he might be followed, and prepared for it."

"But it's incredible!" I protested feebly. "It's incredible!"

"Nothing is incredible in connection with that man."

"But the risk—think of the risk he ran!"

"What does he care for risks? He despises them—and rightly. He got away, didn't he?"

"Yes," I said, "he got away. There's no question of that, I guess."

"Well, that is the story of this afternoon's tragedy, as I understand it," proceeded Godfrey more calmly. "And now I'm going to leave you. I want you to think it over. If it doesn't hold together, show me where it doesn't. But it *will* hold together. It's got to—because it's true."

"But how about Armand?" I protested. "Aren't you going to try to capture him? Are you going to let him get away?"

"He won't get away;" and Godfrey's eyes were gleaming again. "We don't have to search for him; for we've got our trap, Lester; and it's baited with a bait he can't resist—the buhl cabinet!"

"But he knows it's a trap."

"Of course he knows it."

"And you really think he'll walk into it?" I asked incredulously.

"I know he will. One of these days, he'll try to get that cabinet out of the steel cell at the Twentieth Street station, in which we have it locked."

I shook my head.

"He's no such fool," I said. "No man's such a fool as that. He'll give it up and go quietly back to Paris."

"Not if he's the man I think he is," said Godfrey, his hand on the door. "He'll never give up. Just wait, Lester. We'll know in a day or two which of us is a true prophet. The only thing I'm afraid of," he added, his face clouding, "is that he'll get away with the cabinet, in spite of us."

And he went away down the hall, leaving me staring after him.

CHAPTER XXII.

"CROCHARD, L'INVINCIBLE!"

It seemed for once that Godfrey was destined to be wrong, for the days passed and nothing happened—nothing, that is, in so far as the cabinet was concerned. There was an inquest, of course, over the victim of the latest tragedy; and once again I was forced to give my evidence before a coroner's jury. I must confess that, this time, it made me appear considerable of a fool, and the papers poked sly fun at the attorney who had walked blindly into a trap which, now that it was sprung, seemed so apparent.

The Bertillon measurements of the victim had been cabled to Paris, and he had been instantly identified as a fellow named Morel, well known to the police as a daring and desperate criminal. In fact, the prefect considered the matter so important that he cabled next day that he was sending Inspector Pigot to New York to investigate the matter further, and to confer with our bureau as

to the best methods to be taken to apprehend the murderer. Inspector Pigot, it was added, would sail at once from Havre on *La Savoie*.

Meanwhile, Grady's men, with Simmonds at their head, strained every nerve to discover the whereabouts of the fugitive. A net was thrown over the entire city; but, while a number of fish were captured, the one which the police particularly wished for was not among them. Not a single trace of the fugitive was discovered. He had vanished absolutely; and, after a day or two, Grady asserted confidently that he had left New York.

For Grady had come back into the case again, goaded by the papers, particularly by the *Record*, to efforts which he must have considered superhuman. The remarkable nature of the mystery, its picturesque and unique features, the fact that three men had been killed within a few days in precisely the same manner, and the absence of any reasonable hypothesis to explain these deaths —all this served to rivet public attention. Every amateur detective in the country had a theory to exploit—and far-fetched enough most of them were.

Grady did a lot of talking in those days, explaining in detail the remarkable measures he was taking to arrest the criminal; but the fact remained that three men had been killed, and that no one had been punished; that a series of crimes had been committed, and that the criminal was still at large, and seemed likely to remain so; and, naturally enough, the papers, having exhausted every other phase of the case, were soon echoing public sentiment that something was wrong somewhere, and that the detective bureau needed a shaking up from the top down.

The buhl cabinet remained locked up in a cell at the Twentieth Street station; and Simmonds kept the key in his pocket. I know now that he was as much in the dark concerning the cabinet as the general public was; and the general public was very much in the dark indeed, for the cabinet had not figured in the accounts of the first two tragedies at all, and only incidentally in the reports of the latest one. As far as it was concerned, the affair seemed clear enough to most of the reporters, as an attempt to smuggle into the country and get away with an art object of great value. Such cases were too common to attract especial attention.

But Simmonds had come to see that Grady was tottering on his throne. He realized, perhaps, that his own head was not safe; and he had made up his mind to pin his faith to Godfrey as the only one at all likely to lead him out of the maze. And Godfrey laid the greatest stress upon the necessity of keeping the cabinet under lock and key; so under lock and key it was kept. As for Grady, I do not believe that, even at the last, he realized the important part the cabinet had played in the drama.

But, while the buhl cabinet failed to focus the attention of the public, and while most of the reporters promptly forgot all about it, I was amused at the pains which Godfrey took to inform the fugitive as to its whereabouts and as to how it was guarded.

Over and over again, while the other papers wondered at his imbecility, he told how it had been placed in the strongest cell at the Twentieth Street station; a cell whose bars were made of chrome-nickel steel which no saw could bite into; a cell whose lock was worked not only by a key, but by a combination known to one man only; a cell isolated from the others, standing alone in the middle of the third corridor, in full view of the officer on guard, so that no one could approach it, day or night, without being instantly discovered; a cell whose door was connected with an automatic alarm over the sergeant's desk in the front room; a cell, in short, from which no man could possibly escape, and which no man could possibly enter unobserved.

Of the buhl cabinet itself, Godfrey said little, saving his story for the dénouement which he seemed so sure would come; but the details which I have given above were dwelt upon in the *Record*, until, happening to meet Godfrey on the street one day, I protested that he would only succeed in

frightening the fugitive away altogether, even if he still had any designs on the cabinet, which I very much doubted. But Godfrey only laughed.

"There's not the slightest danger of frightening him away," he said. "This fellow isn't that kind. If I'm right in sizing him up, he's the sort of daredevil whom an insuperable difficulty only attracts. The harder the job, the more he is drawn to it. That's the reason I am making this one just as hard as I can."

"But a man would be a fool to attempt to get to that cabinet," I protested. "It's simply impossible."

"It looks impossible, I'm free to admit," he agreed. "But, just the same, I wake every morning cold with fear, and run to the phone to make sure the cabinet's safe. If I could think of any further safeguards, I'd certainly employ them."

I looked at Godfrey searchingly, for it seemed to me that he must be jesting. He laughed as he caught my glance.

"I was never more in earnest in my life, Lester," he said. "You don't appreciate this fellow as I do. He's a genius. Nothing is impossible to him. He disdains easy jobs. When he thinks a job is too easy, he makes it harder just as a sporting chance. He has been known to warn people that they kept their jewels too carelessly, and then, after they had put them in a safer place, he'd go and take them."

"That seems rather foolish, doesn't it?" I queried.

"Not from his point of view. He doesn't steal because he needs money, but because he needs excitement."

"You know who he is, then?" I demanded.

"I think I do. I hope I do; but I'm not going to tell even you till I'm sure. I'll say this: If he is who I think he is, it would be a delight to match one's brains with his. We haven't got any one like him over here—which is a pity."

I was inclined to doubt this, for I have no romantic admiration for gentlemen burglars, even in fiction. However picturesque and chivalric, a thief is, after all, a thief. Perhaps it is my training as a lawyer, or perhaps I am simply narrow; but crime, however brilliantly carried out, seems to me a sordid and unlovely thing. I know quite well that there are many people who look at these things from a different angle. Godfrey is one of them.

I pointed out to him now that, if his intuitions were correct, he would soon have a chance to match his wits with those of the great unknown.

"Yes," he agreed; "and I'm scared to death. I have been ever since I began to suspect his identity. I feel like a tyro going up against a master in a game of chess—mate in six moves."

"I shouldn't consider you exactly a tyro," I said dryly.

"It's long odds that the great unknown *will*," Godfrey retorted, and bade me good-by.

Except for that chance meeting, I saw nothing of him, and in this I was disappointed, for there were many things about the whole affair which I did not understand. In fact, when I sat down of an evening and lit my pipe and began to think it over, I found that I understood nothing at all.

Godfrey's theory held together perfectly, so far as I could see, but it led nowhere. How had Drouet and Vantine been killed? Why had they been killed? What was the secret of the cabinet? In a word, what was all this mystery about? Not one of these questions could I answer; and the solutions I guessed at seemed so absurd that I dismissed them in disgust. In the end, I found that the affair was interfering with my work, and I banished it from my mind, turning my face resolutely away from it whenever it tried to break into my thoughts.

But, though I could shut it out of my waking hours successfully enough, I could not control my sleeping ones, and my dreams became more and more horrible.

It was while I was sitting moodily in my room one night, debating whether or not to go to bed; weary to exhaustion, and yet reluctant to resign myself

to a sleep from which I knew I should wake shrieking that a knock came at the door—a knock I recognized; and I arose joyfully to admit Godfrey.

I could see by the way his eyes were shining that he had something unusual to tell me; and then, as he looked at me, his face changed.

"What's the matter, Lester?" he demanded. "You're looking fagged out. Working too hard?"

"It's not that," I said. "I can't sleep. This thing has upset my nerves, Godfrey. I dream about it—have regular nightmares."

He sat down opposite me, concern and anxiety in his face.

"That won't do," he protested. "You must go away somewhere. Take a rest, and a good long one."

"A rest wouldn't do me any good as long as this mystery is unsolved," I said. "It's only by working that I can keep my mind off of it."

"Well," he smiled, "just to oblige you, we'll solve it first, then."

"Do you mean you know——"

"I know who the great unknown is, and I'm going to tell you presently. Day after to-morrow—Wednesday—I'll know all the rest. The whole story will be in Thursday morning's paper. Suppose you arrange to start Thursday afternoon."

I could only stare at him. He smiled as he met my gaze.

"You're looking better already," he said, "as though you were taking a little more interest in life;" and he helped himself to a cigar.

"Godfrey," I protested, "I wish you'd pick out somebody else to practice on. You come up here and explode a bomb just to see how high I'll jump. It's amusing to you, no doubt, and perhaps a little instructive; but my nerves won't stand it."

"My dear Lester," he broke in, "that wasn't a bomb; that was a simple statement of fact."

"Are you serious?"

"Perfectly so."

"But how do you know——"

"Before I answer any questions, I want to ask you one. Did you, by any chance, mention me to the gentleman known to you as Monsieur Félix Armand?"

"Yes," I answered, after a moment's thought. "I believe I did. I was telling him about our trying to find the secret drawer. I mentioned your name, and he asked who you were. I told him you were a genius at solving mysteries."

Godfrey nodded.

"That," he said, "explains the one thing I didn't understand. Now go ahead with your questions."

"You said a while ago that you would know all about this affair day after to-morrow."

"Yes."

"How do you know you will?"

"Because I have received a letter which sets the date;" and he took from his pocket a sheet of paper and handed it over to me. "Read it."

The letter was written in pencil, in a delicate and somewhat feminine hand, on a sheet of plain, unruled paper. With an astonishment which increased with every word, I read this extraordinary epistle:

MY DEAR MR. GODFREY: I have been highly flattered by your interest in the affair of the cabinet boule, and admire most deeply your penetration in arriving at a conclusion so nearly correct regarding it. I must thank you, also, for your kindness in keeping me informed of the measures which have been taken to guard the cabinet, and which seem to me very complete and well thought out. I have myself visited the station and inspected the cell, and I find that in every detail you were correct.

It is because I so esteem you as an adversary that I tell you, in confidence, that it is my intention to regain possession of my property on Wednesday next, and that, having done so, I shall beg you to accept a small souvenir of the occasion.

I am, dear sir,
Most cordially yours,
JACQUES CROCHARD,
L'Invincible!

I looked up to find Godfrey regarding me with a quizzical smile.

"Of course it's a joke," I said. Then I looked at him again. "Surely, Godfrey, you don't believe this is genuine!"

"Perhaps we can prove it," he said quietly. "That is one reason I came

up. Didn't Armand leave a note for you the day he failed to see you?"

"Yes; on this card. I have it here;" and, with trembling fingers, I got out my pocketbook and drew the card from the compartment in which I had carefully preserved it.

One glance at it was enough. The penciled line on the back was unquestionably written by the same hand which wrote the letter.

"And now you know his name," Godfrey added, tapping the signature with his finger. "I have been certain from the first that it was he."

I gazed at the signature without answering. I had, of course, read in the papers many times of the Gargantuan exploits of Crochard—"the Invincible," as he loved to call himself, and with good reason. But his achievements, at least as the papers described them, seemed too fantastic to be true.

I had suspected more than once that he was merely a figment of the Parisian space writers, a sort of reserve for the dull season; or else that he was a kind of scapegoat saddled by the French police with every crime which proved too much for them.

Now, however, it seemed that Crochard really existed. I held his letter in my hand. I had even talked with him; and, as I remembered the fascination, the finish, the distinguished culture of Monsieur Félix Armand, I understood something of the reason of his extraordinary reputation.

"There can be no two opinions about him," said Godfrey, reaching out his hand for the letter and sinking back in his chair to contemplate it. "Crochard is one of the greatest criminals who ever lived, full of imagination and resource, and with a sense of humor most acute. I have followed his career for years—it was this fact that gave me my first clew. He killed a man once before just as he killed this last one. The man had betrayed him to the police. He was never betrayed again."

"What a fiend he must be!" I said, with a shudder.

But Godfrey shook his head quickly. "Don't get that idea of him," he protested earnestly. "Up to the time of his arrival in New York, he had never killed any man except that traitor. Him he had a certain right to kill—according to thieves' ethics, anyway. His own life has been in peril scores of times; but he has never killed a man to save himself. Put that down to his credit."

"But Drouet and Vantine?" I objected.

"An accident for which he was in no way responsible," said Godfrey promptly.

"You mean he didn't kill them?"

"Most certainly not. This last man he did kill was a traitor like the first. Crochard, I think, reasons like this—to kill an adversary is too easy. It is too brutal. It lacks finesse. Besides, it removes the adversary. And, without adversaries, Crochard's life would be of no interest to him. After he had killed his last adversary, he would have to kill himself."

"I can't understand a man like that," I said. "He's too much for me."

"Well, look at this," said Godfrey, and tapped the letter again. "He honors me by considering me an adversary. Does he seek to remove me? On the contrary, he gives me a handicap. He takes off his queen in order that it may be a little more difficult to mate me."

"But surely, Godfrey," I protested, "you don't take that letter seriously. If he wrote it at all, he wrote it merely to throw you off the track. If he says Wednesday, he really intends to try for the cabinet to-morrow."

"I don't think so. I told you he'd think me only a tyro. And, beside him, that's all I am. Do you know where he wrote that letter, Lester? Right in the *Record* office. That's a sheet of our copy paper. He sat down there, right under my nose, wrote that letter, dropped it into my box, and walked out. And all that some time this evening, when the office was crowded."

"But it's absurd for him to write a letter like that if he really means it. You have only to warn the police——"

"You'll notice he says it's in confidence."

"And you're going to keep it so?"

"Certainly I am. I consider that he has paid me a high compliment. I have shown it to no one but you—also in confidence."

"It is not the sort of confidence the law recognizes," I pointed out. "To keep a confidence like that is called by the law by an ugly name—compounding a felony."

"And yet you'll keep it," said Godfrey cheerfully. "You see, I'm going to do everything I can to prevent that felony. And we will see if Crochard is really invincible."

"I'll keep it," I agreed, "because I think the letter is just a blind. And, by the way," I added, "I have a letter from Armand & Son, confirming the fact that their books show that the buhl cabinet was bought by Philip Vantine. Under the circumstances, I'll have to claim it and hand it over to the Metropolitan."

"I hope you won't disturb it until after Wednesday," said Godfrey quickly. "I won't have any interest in it after that."

"You really think Crochard will try for it Wednesday?"

"I really do."

I shrugged my shoulders. What was the use of arguing with a man like that?

"Till after Wednesday, then," I agreed; and Godfrey, having verified his letter and secured from me the two promises he was after, bade me good night.

TO BE CONCLUDED.

The conclusion of this story will appear, two weeks hence, in the December Month-end POPULAR, on sale November 25th.

THE MAN WHO COULD LOSE ANYTHING

SOME people can lose a pocketknife, some can misplace a ten-dollar note, and others can lose their heads. All of them are good performers, but William H. Santelmann, leader of the United States Marine Band, tells the story of a man who was the champion long-distance, unchallenged, hifaluting loser of all history.

This fellow was, like Santelmann, a native of Germany, and he played the bass drum in a highly uniformed but poorly instructed brass band. On one occasion the band, having been invited to furnish the music at a country fair, was provided with tickets of admission to the grounds. Early in the afternoon, when the natives from miles around were tying their horses and piling into the one entrance to the festivities, the bass-drum player presented himself at the gate. Behind him was a hot, pushing, husky crowd.

"Where's your ticket?" asked the gatekeeper.

"Dot ticket iss los'," explained the German, taking much time to murder the English language.

The crowd behind grew impatient, yelled, hooted, and pushed roughly. The gatekeeper, putting one stalwart hand against the German's chest, used him as a human dam to hold back the surging ocean of humanity.

"My friend," he said, "you couldn't have lost your ticket."

"I tells you," shouted the musician, "dot ticket iss los'."

By this time several hundred men and women were throwing their weight against the German's back and hissing epithets at his thick head.

"Of course," said the gatekeeper, terrified by the hubbub of the throng and weakened by the exertion of pushing in the German's chest while the crowd broke his back, "it's all right. The band's the guest of the fair, but I really must see your ticket. You couldn't have lost your ticket."

"Der hell I cannod los' a ticket!" screamed the German, whose shape, under the pressure before and behind, had assumed the aspect of an hourglass. "Der hell I cannod! I haf los' my bass drum!"

Below the Jam

By A. M. Chisholm

Author of "The Winning Game," "Before the Snow," Etc.

In the woods with the lumberjacks. It doesn't take much to start a row when you've a full-sized grouch. And when both parties are big, two-fisted woodsmen there's pretty sure to be plenty doing

ONCE there was bad blood between two shantymen named Mitchell and Driscoll, who worked in Crooks & Cameron's lumber camps on the Little Canoe. It began, simply enough, on the train that was to take them to the woods in the fall. Before then neither of them had ever seen the other. They had been hired the preceding day, and had utilized the intervening time and their few remaining dollars in accumulating a parting jag. And as this, by force of cruel circumstance, would have to last them until next spring, a fact of which they were quite aware, it was naturally a daisy. Therefore, when they found themselves occupying one seat in the dilapidated old day coach, they were ready to drink more or to fight, with some preference for the latter amusement.

Mitchell had entered the car last, and for some occult reason had chosen to sit alongside Driscoll, whom he did not know at all; but Driscoll was occupying two men's space himself, and was disinclined to motion.

"Move over there and gimme a seat," said Mitchell. "Think you own this car?"

Driscoll grunted profanely, but he moved, and Mitchell sat down.

Just before the train pulled out, Teeny Walsh, eldest daughter of old Pat Walsh who drove the engine, came on the platform to deliver a home message to her father. On the way back, she walked beside the coach which held the lumberjacks. Miss Teeny was auburn-haired and shapely, and her general style appealed to Driscoll, who sat next the window. He stuck a tousled head and unshaven face through it.

"Aw, there!" he said insinuatingly but thickly, under the impression that he was a devil of a fellow.

Miss Teeny, who in all her short life had never been unable to look any human being between the eyes and administer a "calling down" when necessary; and who, moreover, was pleasantly conscious that her steady company, Jack Flanagan, the best fighting brakeman on the line, was a few yards farther down the platform, regarded Driscoll with contempt.

"What's bitin' you, you big highbanker?" she demanded acidly. "Want me to send a hardy lad into that cattle car and slam you through the side of it? Don't you open that false face of yours to a lady!"

"Send the lad along, li'l' girl," grinned Driscoll, who was highly entertained by Miss Walsh's repartee, and conceived a sudden violent affection for her. "Say, I like you, an' when I come back——"

Here Mitchell butted in. The only reason he had not been the offender instead of Driscoll was that he sat next the aisle; but, in a somewhat obfuscated perspective, he now saw beauty in distress, and responded to the call as became a chivalrous gentleman virtuously indignant.

"Here, you low-down, flyin' dog, you stop insultin' that young lady!" he commanded.

Driscoll's head and shoulders vanished forever from the blue eyes of Miss Walsh as he jerked back into the car and confronted Mitchell. And a much expurgated version of what he said is:

"Who on earth are you, and will you kindly mind your own business?"

"You don't insult no woman when I'm around, and you tie into that," said Miss Walsh's self-elected champion.

"Insult?" echoed Driscoll indignantly. "I never insulted no woman. I guess that little brick-top can take care of herself. Annyways, it ain't your put in, me buck. So take that, to learn you!" And he smote Mitchell on the nose.

In ten seconds, two seats were wrecked, and as many panes were out of the car windows. Lumberjacks howled joyously and climbed on seats to see the scrap, surging down into the center of the moving car, a swaying, lurching mass of brawny, two-fisted humanity, most of them three parts drunk and willing to take a hand themselves on the slightest provocation. And they offered gratuitous counsel to the tangled mess that was Driscoll and Mitchell.

"Hammer th' face of him!" advised Tom Hales, who knew Mitchell.

"Th' knee—th' knee in th' wind! It's wide open he is till yez!" cried Larry Foley to Driscoll.

"Sacredam! Bite heem on hees ear!" shrieked Moise Groulx impartially to whomsoever that form of assault might come handy.

"Shut up!" roared Foley. "Sure, there never was a pea-jammin' Frenchman yet that knowed what fair fightin' was. Ye dirty man-eaters!"

And the indignation of Foley at the unfair military tactics of the Gauls—deplored aforetime by one Caius Julius Cæsar, who had ample opportunities for observing them—caused him to plant a fist like a bag of stones in the face of the representative of that ancient race, thus enlarging the area of disturbance, which proceeded to grow with startling rapidity.

By this time, the train was out of the yard, and the rumble and click of the wheels and groaning of the trucks mingled with the howls of the combatants. The interior of the car was simply disintegrating. Glass tinkled merrily along the right of way; seats, supposedly fixtures, came out by the roots, and chaos was impending.

But at this juncture, Bill Smith—who was Crooks & Cameron's best foreman, and a rough-and-tumble fighter to his fingers' tips, besides being exceedingly sober as his responsibilities demanded—entered the car from the rear; while the conductor, Rory McLachlin, a huge and hairy son of the Glen, entered from the baggage car.

Smith blamed himself for an unavoidable brief absence which had allowed the row to start. And Big Rory was exceedingly wrath, because, although there is excellent authority to the effect that peacemakers shall be blessed, the same authority is entirely silent as to more immediate personal results; and he happened to be wearing a new uniform, which, for a wonder, was large enough, and yet fitted perfectly.

So they both bored in for the center of the cyclone, and, arriving there about the same time, respectively seized on Mitchell and Driscoll, who were already much the worse for wear, and proceeded to thump them into sobriety and decent behavior.

"It's you that's raisin' this hell, is it?" roared Smith to the former. "Think you're a scrapper, hey? I'll show you. Sit down, you dog!" And Mitchell sat down with exceeding suddenness before the impact of the foreman's fist, while McLachlin performed the same office for Driscoll.

For the time being, the two men had had their fill of fighting, and they would have been content to sit and glower at each other had not Driscoll, after an unavailing search for a half-filled bottle of whisky which he had thoughtfully cached in his "turkey," accused Mitchell of taking it.

Mitchell's reply, besides a denial, contained certain genealogical reflections covering many generations. Driscoll immediately hit him, and they went at

it afresh. Once more Bill Smith intervened; and this time he did it so effectively that they forbore further hostilities; but they sulked and glared at each other, which was considerably worse.

From this period of gestation, when they had nothing to do but think of their wrongs, hate was born. They were battered and sore physically and mentally. Their heads ached with the dying fumes of the cheap whisky they had imbibed; the light struck their eyeballs painfully; they were dry with a thirst which water refused to satisfy, and there was no more whisky to be had. In fact, they were in that peculiarly surly and sometimes murderous mood that follows alcoholic excess, and each considered that he had a good cause of grievance against the other.

From Driscoll's standpoint, Mitchell had it coming to him. He, Driscoll, was not to blame. He had, in fact, comported himself in an exceedingly gentlemanly manner. He had said nothing offensive to that little sorrel-headed girl back on the platform. And, if he had, what business was it of Mitchell's? But Mitchell had butted in and started the whole row. And afterward, not satisfied with that, he had stolen the whisky for which he, Driscoll, would now cheerfully give a month's pay. He was a dirty thief, a disgrace to the ancient and honorable profession of logging. Driscoll felt like taking an ax to him.

But Mitchell saw things from quite another angle. That unmentionable Driscoll had got gay with a good little girl, and he, Mitchell, had done what any gentleman would have done; namely, called him for it. For which Driscoll had slugged him and started the whole fuss. And then Driscoll had wrongfully accused him of stealing some rotgut whisky; and, when he had denied it with becoming emphasis, Driscoll had hit him again. In fact, Driscoll was "picking on" him. He was a bully, was Driscoll. Mitchell would have liked to bash in his head with a peavey. He would show him. He would get square, and he would give him warning.

"Maybe you think you can run on me," he said to him as they stood on the platform of the little backwoods station waiting for the tote teams. "Well, you can't. I won't take nothin' more from you. You try it, and you'll go out of these woods in a blanket. It's comin' to you."

Driscoll's reply was unprintable, and the feud was on.

Day after day and week after week in the bush, on the trail, and in the bunk house they snarled at each other like two strange dogs, but for want of a fresh, plausible pretext never came to blows.

One night Mitchell, on his way to his bunk, stumbled over Driscoll's outstretched foot, and, believing that he had been tripped deliberately, turned and ran at him. In a twinkling, the camp was in a turmoil.

The noise brought Bill Smith from his quarters. For the third time, he dragged the two men apart, somewhat battered, but full of fight, and threatened to discharge both if there was any further fighting. Neither wished to lose his job; and they bottled up their hatred against the day when there would be no job to lose.

Both men were sawyers; and Smith, out of deviltry or a desire to see if they really meant business, put them on one saw. They sawed as if their lives depended on it. Each tried to wear the other out. They bent their backs, and the tool screeched and ripped ceaselessly from daylight to nooning, and from nooning to dark. Down the length of the saw they eyed each other, wordless but hating deeply; and the sweat of their toil dropped from their eyebrows on the snow.

Occasionally the nature of the work demanded speech.

"That way?" Driscoll would say, indicating with a nod the direction in which the tree was to be felled.

"Don't tell me which way she's to go!" Mitchell would reply, with a scowl. And then they would bend and saw with fury, while the steel between them grew hot as it bit the wood.

One day Mitchell dropped his saw as

the last fibers of wood began to crack, and coolly walked under the falling tree. It was a piece of foolhardiness not uncommon among the youngsters in the bush, who had yet to learn that there were chances enough in life without creating more. If the tree falls fair and clean, as it does nine times out of ten, it is perfectly safe for a man with a cool head; but if the tree is not sawn true, or if there is a heavy wind, or if it twists in the fall from any cause, it is exceedingly dangerous.

Driscoll sneered at Mitchell.

"You think you're doing something, you—fool," he said.

"I'm doing something you won't do, because you haven't got the sand," said Mitchell.

Very childish, wasn't it? Not in any way different from the "dare" of one schoolboy to another, except that it was deliberately playing with death.

Both knew it. A man may walk under a hundred falling trees, quite calmly and taking his time, his eyes on the brown bulk leaning and threatening him with ever-increasing swiftness, and do it without once quickening his pace; but sooner or later, the trunk of some tree will lurch and leap at him with the deadly swiftness of a wild beast on its prey; and then only a quick eye and a quicker spring, with muscles swift to avoid the peril the eye beholds, will prevent his lying a crushed pulp in the snow. And deep snow, bushes, and roots make a poor take-off for a sudden jump. Therefore, the lumberjack who wishes to display his foolishness usually chooses his ground carefully.

Driscoll said nothing; but, as the next tree tottered, he let go his saw and started to walk underneath. Halfway he met Mitchell. Neither would move out of the other's path. The trunk of the tree, descending, actually touched their heads as they sprang back. They glared at each other across the fallen timber. Then Driscoll said:

"You want to kill me, do you?"

And Mitchell answered: "You'll save me the trouble if you try that again."

"I'll walk under every tree we fall from now on," Driscoll declared, with an oath, "and we'll see who dies first. Will you go to the right or the left?"

"I'll keep to my right and you keep to yours," said Mitchell. And so it was arranged.

The grim sport became fascinating. At the first crack of parting wood, one would glance at the other furtively, seeking some sign of weakness or of holding back. When the tree had fallen they regarded each other without words, but with mutual disappointment.

So strongly did hate obsess them that each carried with him, by day and night, a mental picture of the other lying in the snow, crushed by falling timber, and found the secret vision comforting.

Mitchell, watching Driscoll roll into his bunk at night, would say to himself: "This is the last night's sleep for you, me buck!"

And Driscoll, eying Mitchell eating breakfast by dim lamplight an hour before the dawn, would say inwardly: "Eat, you dog! It's little use for grub you'll have to-morrow!"

Each endeavored to shake the other's nerve. All the tales they had ever heard of men killed by falling timber they dug up and retold in loud tones, with fancy touches. Every camp has such yarns in abundance; and, when other men related them, the two searched each others' faces for a sign of apprehension.

They had narrow escapes. Once Driscoll's moccasin caught in a hidden root, and he only saved himself by a wrench and a dive forward that landed him full length on his face beside the fallen trunk. As he rose, Mitchell was grinning at him.

"Not that time," said Driscoll grimly.

"Next," said Mitchell.

The same afternoon a tree slewed in the fall, and Mitchell thrust himself away from it with his hands, tripping as he leaped backward. He arose, amid the flying snow, to meet Driscoll's eager eyes.

"Nor that time," said Mitchell; and Driscoll swore in his disappointment; whereat Mitchell grinned again wolfishly, flirting the snow from the back of his neck.

Driscoll grew cunning. He no longer drew the saw through, firm and steady, against the wood the length of its cut, but lifted his end outward slightly. The result was uneven cutting, and the introduction of an element of uncertainty as to just where the tree would fall. This increased the risk to both, but most to Mitchell as long as he did not know of it. But Driscoll argued that it was perfectly fair.

Mitchell read the new expectancy in the other's eyes, and felt the slight tilt of the saw, which pressed his end into the wood and Driscoll's away from it. From this his attention was drawn to the width of the broken wood fibers on Driscoll's side of the stump.

"Saw true," he said. "Two can play at that game."

After that Driscoll gave up the attempt in disgust.

The grim contest could not be hidden from the men, and thence it came to the foreman's ears. He watched them drop two trees and walk under each. Then he called Driscoll and put him to work with Landriau, and paired Mitchell with Scott. Also he told them what he thought of them in unmeasured language.

"You're a pair of fools," he wound up. "If you want to fight and settle it, do it right here, and then shake hands and be men again."

They heard him sullenly. At one time they would have jumped at the chance; but now their hate had deepened until it was not to be settled by any casual encounter in the snow with moccasins on their feet. When they fought, if they ever did fight, it would be to a finish, wearing the spiked boots of the river driver, and with no one to interfere. And meanwhile, if either could work the other an injury, he would do so. No, they would not fight.

"Very well," said Smith. "If you won't fight like men, I won't have you tryin' to kill one another in the bush. If there's any more funny work, I'll make you wish you were dead."

For the remainder of the winter they worked apart and did not exchange a word. Occasionally coming into camp in the ghostly half light of the winter evening, Driscoll would surprise a covert, baleful glance from under Mitchell's heavily thatched brows; and Mitchell, playing a hand of forty-fives at night and chancing to look up suddenly, would see Driscoll's eyes fixed on him from a distant corner of the room, and in them he read bitter hate. Both waited the opportunity that did not come.

"I'll get him on the river," thought Mitchell.

"There's ten men drowned to one that's killed by falling timber," Driscoll reflected. "And the Little Canoe is bad driving. Maybe it will settle his hash."

With the coming of spring, the roads failed, and, as no more logs could be got out, the camp suspended logging operations. The entire winter's cut was lying on the ice of the river, and banked in huge piles on the rollways at its edge. When the ice went out, these last would be rolled into the river, where the driving crew would take charge of them and pilot them downstream through clear current, rapids, shallows, sluices, and backwaters to their destination at Crooks & Cameron's mills.

A lumberjack is not necessarily a riverman; but many of them are. And a goodly proportion, when the river opens, pull on the spiked boots and exchange ax and saw for peavey and pike pole, and so make their way by water to the town where they are paid off. Driscoll and Mitchell were rivermen as well as sawyers.

The men began to break out the rollways, knocking out the wedges and starting the logs with peavies. Pile after pile of brown monsters thundered down the bank, disappeared in clouds of white spray, and emerged, rolling and wallowing, like huge amphibians, to begin their last long journey to the habitations of men.

Mitchell and Driscoll were both working at the rollways. It was the first time they had worked in close proximity in months. Mitchell was at the foot of a pile of banked logs. The wedges had been knocked out, but the skids had settled slightly, and the logs

would not move. Mitchell caught a bottom one with his peavey and yanked savagely on the stock. At the same instant, Driscoll, on top of the pile, boosted a stick, and it began to roll. Then, without warning, the whole mass loosened and rumbled down.

Mitchell who was standing directly in front of the middle of the pile, was caught between it and the river. He had no time to get to one side. If he jumped down the bank, he would be killed by the falling timbers. Therefore, his mind working accurately and quickly, he leaped forward, and began to scale the face of the rolling logs. He ran up them as a squirrel runs in a treadmill, and bounded from the topmost, as it sank away beneath his feet, onto the solid ground beyond. He alighted beside Driscoll. Driscoll was not to blame for the sudden start of the timbers; but Mitchell chose to believe that he was.

"I'll settle with you for that!" he said grimly.

"Settle nothing!" said Driscoll. "I didn't start them going."

Public opinion was in Driscoll's favor; and Mitchell, glaring at him, forbore to press the charge home.

"There'll be jams on the river," he said darkly. "You've got it coming to you this time, me buck."

Driscoll consigned him to perdition afresh. The other men protested.

"It's sinful of yeez lads to act this way," said Con Donovan, a veteran of the river. "Take shame to yerselves. Fight out yer grudge, if ye like; but don't charge murder on a man, nor threaten the coward's dirty shove when a jam pulls."

"Mind your own business," said Mitchell sulkily, and told him where to go to mind it.

"This is between him and me," said Driscoll to Donovan. "We'll settle it as we like. It's fair for both. None of yez has call to butt in."

"If one of yez is bad hurted by the other save in fair fight, I'll make it my business," said old Donovan grimly. "I'll not stand by and see murder done, nor will the rest of the lads. So mind what I'm tellin' ye."

In a week's time a jam occurred, and it was a beauty. It took place in an angle of the Chain Rapids, known as the "Dog's Leg." Here the head of the drive, sweeping downstream, bunched, the big logs, pounding and sousing in the swift current, took the ground for an instant. That did the business. More surged down on them immediately, reared up, twisted, fell across them at every angle, and pinned them down. Still more battered these, and rode them. In ten minutes, the entire drive had caught, plugged, and jammed.

The breast of the jam rose higher and higher, a solid mass of timber bristling in wild confusion, damming back the water, but held fast by its own tremendous weight. When it could rise no higher, the tail of it began to form, stretching upstream, as if by magic, as the logs butted against the main jam and were held there by the water. It formed as quickly as a row of dominoes falls when the end one is tipped over. Almost two miles of rapids were full of timber, all held up and dammed back by the resistance exerted by certain logs somewhere at the bottom of the jam.

To find these key logs and release them was the business of the driving crew; and it was a task of both difficulty and danger. The river boss, whose name was McKeever, arrived from the rear, and, with his lieutenants, sized up the situation. It was not promising. There seemed nothing for it, however, but to get into the heart of the jam; and the crew went at it at once.

The jam towered high above them, immense, threatening; and from beneath its foot and through the crevices gushed water, driven by the pressure of the stream behind, shooting out in white rivulets, hissing and gurgling as it tore at the timber that obstructed its course.

They began to get out the logs, prying and boosting them with peavies, pulling and lifting and gradually moving in on the jam. There the logs were wedged into an apparently inextricable

tangle; butts and tops thrust forth, piled at every conceivable angle. The jam was a threatening mass; a mighty engine lying inert, waiting for some one to touch the spring that should stir it to wild life. Somewhere down in the heart of the thing, far beneath the shaggy brown of its breast, were certain logs, set like triggers, which controlled the monster. When these were tripped, the whole mass would go out in a whirl of grinding, groaning, upending timbers, thundering downstream with mighty, immeasurable force.

When a river crew goes out to break a jam by hand, its members carry their lives in their hands, or, rather, in their feet. The logs on which they work are wet, set at every angle, and, where the bark has been stripped off, as slippery as a greased plank. Above the men hangs a mass of timber with an awful power behind it, which it is their busines to set in motion. When it starts, it is every man for himself, and his way to shore lies over a writhing, contorting field of sticks of pine. Woe to the man whose boot calks are dull or who makes one misstep! Add to the complexities of the situation a beautiful uncertainty as to just when the jam will pull, and you get some idea of the most risky part of a riverman's job. He must be strong, quick on his feet, possessed of what is almost an intuition in the selection of his footing, and, above all, he must be without nerves.

Driscoll and Mitchell were good rivermen. They dug into the jam with their peavies with apparent carelessness, but, in reality, with great caution. Each had his route for shore marked out in his mind, and knew exactly what he would do when the first premonitory thrill, tremble, and groan heralded a break.

Although the danger of the work demanded much attention, they watched each other closely. Both were suspicious, for, in the confusion of a breaking jam, many things may happen unnoticed. A shove, a trip, a sudden thrust with the stock of a peavey, and there will be a man short at night, with nobody the wiser.

Occasionally their eyes met; but with the hate in them there mingled an abstraction, a speculation, a patient but alert waiting for a moment of peril which would call into play every power of eye, mind, and body. Their ill-feeling was not lessened, but each unconsciously was more suspicious of the other's intentions than desirous of doing him any harm just at that time. Each was willing to leave the matter to the many chances of the jam; but, not knowing the workings of the other's mind, kept a keen lookout for a possible hostile act.

The jam did not break. After a day's work, it was still there, and apparently as firm as ever. The logs that had been released made no impression on it; progress was inappreciable. McKeever began to use dynamite, of which he had but a scanty supply. Logs, fragments of wood and bark, and columns of water shot up; but the jam remained—huge, brown, impassive. On the second day, twenty shots were fired at once. The jam quivered, groaned, began to move, heaved forward a few yards, and then stopped dead, two feet higher and a few hundred tons larger and heavier than before.

The dynamite being exhausted, the men went at it in the good old-fashioned, perilous way, picking out the logs one by one. McKeever himself, wise in the ways of logs and jams, took a peavey and led the assault. Tier after tier of timber was thrown down, and they burrowed into the maw of the monster, seeking the key logs. They did this for two days. At the end of that time it pulled again, and again it plugged. But McKeever thought he had found the spot. He altered his opinion at the close of another day.

The next morning, about ten o'clock, Mitchell and Driscoll found themselves side by side below the face of the jam. Driscoll clamped his peavey into a log and boosted, and boosted again, but failed to move it. Mitchell, without a word, took hold also, and the two strained every muscle.

The log moved, half turned, and then, without warning, the whole mass sprang

to life. Up under their feet the heavy timbers heaved suddenly; above their heads the huge sticks shot forward, and began to fall. One moment there was an apparently immovable body. In a second it became magically an irresistible force. The jam roared and pulled; and this time it meant business.

Both men glanced upward, shoreward, and at each other, and sprang for safety with exceeding swiftness, but without haste. The moving logs were dotted with men doing likewise. They held their peavies across them at the waist, and bounded from log to log without pausing. Each contraction of the muscles was followed by another as automatically as the movement of a runner on level ground; and the effect was as if they spurned the rearing logs rather than gained a foothold with every leap.

Driscoll was slightly in front of Mitchell and nearer the breaking jam. Neither was thinking of the other at that moment. The eyes of each were fixed on a constantly shifting spot some six feet in front of him—the spot that respresented the take-off for another spring.

Suddenly a log up-ended in front of Driscoll. He was in the act of leaping, and could not check himself. His knees struck against it, and he fell. As he fell, the log rolled and nipped his leg against another. He tried to rise, but could not, and so he drew himself lengthwise on the log, and lay there, setting his teeth to meet the death that roared down upon him.

Mitchell, in his zigzag course, out of the tail of his eye, saw him go down. He balanced himself for an instant; and, as he saw his enemy struggle to rise and fall back, he grinned in triumph, and poised for a fresh spring.

The river had done the business without his help, after all. This, then, was Driscoll's finish! He had cheated the falling timber all winter; but he could not cheat the river that took its toll of life yearly. It was good enough for him, too. In a few ticks of a watch he would be battered to nothingness by the thundering logs. He would not have even a grave! Mitchell uttered the first note of a laugh; but suddenly it stuck in his throat.

Driscoll, lying on the log, clinging to it with his right arm, looked at Mitchell, raised his left hand, and put the thumb of it to his nose, the fingers outstretched in mocking, contemptuous farewell.

The very bravado of the act stirred Mitchell. The helplessness of his enemy made his triumph a poor thing, and he forgot the hate of months in involuntary admiration. After all, Driscoll knew how to die.

"By —— he's game!" Mitchell cried aloud.

His eye swept the blue sky, dotted with fleecy clouds; the budding green of the trees, the glint of the blue water, and rested once more on the man lying helpless on the log. It was all in the instant as his muscles gathered under him, seeking his own safety. And then his triumphant grin vanished, his jaw set hard, and he leaped across the rearing logs toward the onrushing face of the jam.

Beneath his feet the big sticks surged, heaved, toppled over each other, and sank away. He was being swept downstream, as on the breast of an avalanche; and almost on top of him reared the crumbling crest of the brown monster, ready to engulf him. He reached Driscoll, dropped his peavey, stooped, threw him across his shoulders with a mighty heave, and, carrying this burden, staggered, somehow, ashore. Behind them, the jam, driven by the enormous force of water and its own released weight, thundered past.

Mitchell dumped Driscoll unceremoniously on the ground, and, without even looking at him, grabbed a fresh peavey and joined the crew, who were working furiously at the logs winged out by the rush. Not till night, when, tired and hungry, the men gathered at the tents, did he think again of him. Then McKeever touched him on the arm.

"Driscoll wants to see you, Mitchell," he said.

Mitchell cursed Driscoll ferociously.

"Cut that out," said the river boss.

"Go and see the man. His leg is broke."

Mitchell found Driscoll lying on blankets in a tent.

"Well, what do you want o' me?" he demanded sourly.

"I've quit, and I want to tell you so," said Driscoll. "Maybe I ain't used you just right, Mitchell. We've had it in for each other, but that's over, far's I'm concerned. 'Tain't likely you'll let me thank you for what you done, but it was mighty white of you. You got sand."

"I didn't know it was you," said Mitchell untruthfully, much embarrassed. "Sand? Say, I ain't in it with you for nerve! How—how'd it be if we shook hands, Dinny?"

The next fall, Mitchell and Driscoll hired into the same camp, slept in the same bunk, and were inseparable chums. And now, though they have quit the shanties, their little backwoods farms adjoin; and in the evenings, when the tang of the fall frosts is in the air, and through the winter, when the white drifts are piled high and time is plenty on their hands, they visit back and forth, and become guardedly reminiscent of their more innocent exploits, to the pride and open-eyed wonder of their respective families. But they never, in the hearing of third persons, go back of the breaking of the jam on the Little Canoe, for they are both ashamed of what preceded it.



NEGLECT AMONG THE MUCKRAKERS

AT a dinner in the national capital a member of the United States Senate made this remark to Miss Mabel Boardman, the Red Cross organizer:

"It seems to me that the muckraker writers have missed no opportunity to discover excuses for turning out abuse and blame."

"You're mistaken," she objected. "They've missed one chance—introspection."

THE GENEROSITY OF HOKE SMITH

RALPH SMITH, who is not related in any way to Hoke Smith, the Georgia statesman, tells this story on Hoke:

Hoke, who was at that time governor of the State, called in his son, and addressed to him these remarks:

"My son, I have made my will, and have left my property as I desired, dividing it fairly and suitably. But to you I am going to give an invaluable thing. I shall, henceforward, give you half an hour of my time every day."

THE OBLIGING MR. SCHROEDER

REGINALD SCHROEDER, who is the Washington correspondent for the New York *Staats-Zeitung*, a newspaper printed in German, is noted for his knowledge of men and affairs in the national capital, and his fellow journalists are always anxious to get the advantage of his facts and opinion. One day he was writing an article when Edward E. Coyle dropped into his office.

"Schroeder," said Coyle, "I would like to read your story, but I haven't the time to wait for you to finish it. Will you make me a carbon copy of it and leave it in my office?"

"Certainly," replied Schroeder, "I shall be very glad to accommodate you."

The next morning Coyle found in his office a bulky envelope containing the carbon copy. He took off his coat, sat down at his desk, and prepared to study the writings of Schroeder. But he never did it. The whole article was there—in German, and Coyle did not know a word of the language.

The first part of this story appeared in the November Month-end number of the POPULAR which is still on the news stands.

The Brass God

By Henry C. Rowland

Author of "Cross-Tag," "The Make-Believe Man," Etc.

SYNOPSIS OF FIRST PART

Directed northward by his little brass Chinese idol, Otis Carroll goes into New Hampshire in search of a place to live. He stumbles upon an old mill that he rents for a modest sum, and settles down to write stories and carefully conserve his modest resources. Again acting under the advice of his small idol, he takes a wandering tramp, one Riley by name, an ex-sailor, and his bulldog into his employ to act as butler and bodyguard. Carroll gets his household goods unpacked and asks his brass god what else is needed to make the place complete, and the god points out a pretty girl who is riding by on her bicycle and stops to ask her way. She proves to be Elinor Wade, a young woman who has just had wide and unpleasant, as well as undeserved newspaper notoriety. She is seeking seclusion, and being a competent stenographer, Carroll arranges to have her assist him in his work. They ask the idol where she shall live and he sends her to the Widow Smithers, nearby. Carroll, at one time engaged to be married to Miss Marjorie Willett, a very beautiful society girl, has been thrown over by her because of his lack of available funds. They have not seen each other for several years and Otis believes that he is still in love with her. A terrible thunder shower comes up one afternoon while Otis and Miss Wade are at work shortly after she has agreed to assist him, and an automobile party stops at the mill for shelter. Carroll opens the door and in step Miss Willett, Miss Putney, whom she is visiting, and Miss Putney's cousin, Sam Collingwood, the millionaire through whose carelessness Miss Wade suffered her unpleasant and costly publicity. It is a most embarrassing situation, but Elinor of them all is the only one who rises to it gracefully. With great tact she carries the affair off successfully, and the party finally depart with warm expressions of thanks for the shelter, leaving both Elinor and Otis somewhat breathless.

(*A Two-part Story—Part II.*)

CHAPTER I.

MISS MARJORIE WILLETT awakened in the night, and heard the Westminster chimes of the big clock in the lower hall strike the hour of two. The rest of her night was spent in listening to the variations of the same musical notes as they chimed every succeeding quarter hour up to seven of the morning. Marjorie decided that a chiming hall clock was a splendid wedding present to give to your worst enemy.

But during the impatient intervals spent in waiting for the chimes, Marjorie was thinking of Otis Carroll, and in this connection of a girl with bronze-colored hair, a boyish face, and a clear but low-pitched voice.

Marjorie's reflections were not nearly as useful to her as her sleep would have been, nor were they anything like as agreeable. The chance meeting with Carroll had come just when she had about made up her mind to marry Mr. Collingwood, and the result of it had been to entirely upset this determination. In the studio, with Carroll and Collingwood apparently in competition to see which one could best represent a stricken idiot, Marjorie had found Collingwood "ridiculous" and Carroll "lovably genuine." Yet the casual observer would have been apt to consider the event a draw.

"It's no use," Marjorie moaned to herself. "I've always been in love with Otis, and always will be, and I might as well marry him and make the worst of it. If I were to marry Sam for his money, I would always want love, and

if I marry Otis for love, I will always want money, but a woman has *got* to have love——"

Which philosophy all those in the position to know will appreciate as containing a sound philosophy, unoriginal, but indisputable.

Marjorie found it quite impossible to think of Carroll as ever belonging to another woman. When she had broken their engagement two years before, Carroll had told her that his life was ruined and that he could never love again. No doubt he had believed it at the time. Marjorie had believed it, and had remained firmly convinced that, although they might not see nor even hear from each other, Carroll would never become interested in another woman as long as she herself remained unwed.

This idea was not only extremely touching to her romantic sense, but gave her also the pleasant feeling of something held in reserve. Marjorie had always acknowledged the possibility of her some day marrying Carroll. He was the only man who had ever really stirred her, and, after all, even if Carroll had practically nothing to support them, he was a competent person of more than the average ability, and Marjorie had no doubt that it would be easy enough to secure him a good position, through some of her rich and influential friends. He would have to give up his writing, of course, but that was unimportant.

Marjorie had been much more startled at finding Carroll located in the vicinity than she had at Elinor Wade's presence in the studio. She knew Carroll for an extremely decent man, chivalrous to a degree and of a strongly Puritanic propriety where women were concerned. He had evidently met this Wade girl in some way, and turned over to her his typewriting work, which she came to the studio every day to execute. Marjorie could see nothing to disturb her in that. Besides, she knew that if there was anything between the two the picture of herself would not be occupying the most conspicuous place in the studio.

Collingwood had made it almost unpleasantly plain to Millicent and Marjorie that they were to think no wrong of Elinor Wade as the result of her presence in Carroll's studio. He also took occasion to repeat what he had told them before: that Elinor Wade was absolutely innocent of any wrong behavior and merely the victim of his own inexcusable action and the police methods of his late wife. Collingwood was waxing rather heated in his vindication of the girl when the practical Millicent interrupted:

"Do shut up, Sam. We know well enough that Miss Wade is all right. Besides, a girl that has to earn her own living can't lug a chaperon around with her when she goes to work. Let's talk about something sad."

But in spite of all, Marjorie *was* disturbed at the thought of Carroll's daily companionship with Elinor Wade. She was bound to admit that the girl was decidedly attractive and in a very strongly individual way. Marjorie would not have called her pretty; her face was too wide and her nose too short. But there was a compelling power in her long, gray eyes which told of personality. Marjorie was forced to admit that her figure was better than her own.

Any woman, jealous or not, would have been forced to admit that nothing could have been more difficult than Elinor's position when the three from the motor car had rushed into the studio. Yet, while Marjorie herself was sitting dazed, bewildered, and tongue-tied in the first rush of her emotion at seeing Carroll, and the two men were babbling incoherent imbecilities, Elinor Wade had faced the situation with a quiet and dignified serenity not to be excelled.

Marjorie decided to herself that here might easily be a dangerous rival, and that this association must be broken off without delay. She was by no means sure that she wanted to marry Carroll, but she certainly did not want any other woman to do so.

But the question was how to go about this. It would be necessary for her to

see Carroll alone, and such a tête-à-tête would be very apt to lead to a precipitation of affairs with Collingwood. Marjorie had not the slightest doubt that Collingwood meant to ask her to marry him before he left the Putneys', which would be in about a week. He was not the man to be kept dangling, being to some degree lacking in that beautiful and chivalrous humility toward women, so admirable in the American males.

Marjorie had about made up her mind to marry either Carroll or Collingwood, but she found some difficulty in deciding which should be the favored one. Carroll was the only man for whom she had ever really cared, whereas Collingwood was the only rich man to whom she had ever felt that she could give herself in holy matrimony without a certain repugnance. But she feared that Collingwood already suspected her of some former tendresse for Carroll, and if he were to learn that she had seen him alone he would probably insist upon a prompt and definite location of his own position. Wherefore, Marjorie decided that she must arrange to see Carroll without Collingwood's knowledge.

Having arrived at this decision at about eight of the morning, she got out of bed, slipped into her kimono, and, going to the writing desk, quickly penned the following:

DEAR OTIS: Our unexpected meeting of yesterday has brought back so many old memories that you have been in my thoughts ever since.

After all, why should we not be good friends? I would love to have a few minutes' talk with you alone before you come here to call. Millicent and Mr. Collingwood are going to ride to-morrow afternoon at three. I have decided to beg off going with them, and shall take the dogs and walk down to the lake. If you were to happen that way I should be glad for the chance of a little chat with you. Always your friend,

MARJORIE.

This not too discreet missive was sealed, and a little later taken in to Millicent.

"I've written a line to Otis Carroll, asking him to call," said Marjorie. "He's an old friend, and I thought I ought to add my voice to yours, especially after what happened yesterday and that girl being there and all. He is horribly sensitive."

"All right," said Millicent. "Wait a minute, and I'll scratch off a line, and we'll send 'em both down this morning by James."

Which being duly executed, the two girls went down to the breakfast room, where they were greeted by the immaculately flanneled Mr. Collingwood.

Carroll, with an impatient gesture, interrupted his dictation to read the two notes brought in by Riley, who informed him that they had been left by Mr. Putney's groom.

"Excuse me, please," said Carroll, and ran his eye over the two notes, Marjorie's last. Elinor, who was seated before the typewriter, did not look at him, but straightened the leaves of her manuscript with fingers which were slightly nervous.

Carroll put the two letters in the side pocket of his coat, and leaned back in his chair.

"Miss Willett wants to see me," said he slowly. "I don't know whether to go or not."

Elinor made no reply. Carroll looked at her doubtfully.

"If I thought that she wanted to ask any questions about your being here, I wouldn't see her," said he.

"Why not?"

"Because it would probably make me angry and we might not agree. When a man has cherished an ideal as long as I have, he hates the thought of losing it."

"The first day we met," said Elinor, "you spoke of her as an illusion."

"Oh, that didn't apply to her. The illusion part was my thinking that such a girl would ever be fool enough to marry me for myself alone. I never blamed her. But there has never been any one for me but Marjorie Willett, and I don't want to run the risk of feeling any differently."

There was a peculiar expression of tender amusement in Elinor's eyes as she answered quietly:

"I don't think that you need be

afraid to see her. She will never so much as mention me."

"What? Why not?"

"She has got too much sense. She knows the sort of man you are, and she would feel instinctively that you would resent any unjust insinuation. You had better go to see her, I think."

Carroll looked slightly upset. "But she wants to see me this afternoon."

"Well?"

"But we were going to ride over to the Springs on our wheels."

Elinor threw back her head, and laughed. She had a charming laugh, low-pitched, gurgling, and in quality of sound not unlike the bubbling of the water in the flume under the floor of the studio.

Carroll looked at her resentfully, but with unconscious admiration. Elinor's face, boyish in repose, became when she laughed that of a mischievous wood nymph. Her head tilted back, the gray eyes half closed, the upper lip curved up on itself in the middle, showing a rim of its pink lining. She had often been told that her laugh was unseemly, and thought that it must be so, as she had frequently observed that men who had not previously noticed her were apt to stare after having seen her laugh.

Carroll, by reason of a streak of direct childishness which he had never outgrown, often amused Elinor intensely. There appeared sometimes in his moments of gravest perplexity a "little boyness," which made her feel infinitely older than he, and aroused a sort of maternal tenderness.

"You speak as if you were going to be sent to have your hair cut instead of keeping a tryst with the only woman for whom you ever cared," said she. "As for going to the Springs, what does that matter?"

"I hate to break an engagement," said Carroll.

"It is not an engagement. It was merely a plan. But of course I wouldn't go to see Miss Willett if I didn't want to."

"Of course I want to." Carroll's voice held a sort of pettishness. "I am as much in love with her as I ever was. I will go, of course, since you seem to think that there's no chance of her saying anything disagreeable. Now, let's go on with this stuff—if I can, in spite of the interruption. How do you like what I've done this morning?"

"It's all right. Rather better, it seems to me."

"*I* like it better. There is really something in the atmosphere of this place that makes it easy to work. It's restful, too. I was afraid I was going to be bored here, or get the jumps. But it's quite the reverse. I feel as if I never wanted to move. Look here." He turned suddenly to Elinor. "Do you really intend to go back to town the first of the month?"

Elinor nodded.

"But why can't you stop on another?"

"Don't be absurd," she interrupted sharply, and with a sort of anger. "You know as well as I do that I must go. Your book is all typed, and you can do these plays as well as I. There is nothing more to keep me here. I have got to hunt for a position, and you have got to save every penny until you sell something. How much have you got left?"

"About fifty dollars," said Carroll sheepishly.

"About fifty dollars, and stores to buy, and Riley's wages, and another quarter's rent nearly due. You are a nice one to talk of engaging a private secretary! What you had better do is to sell that stock you are carrying on a margin. You say that there is a little profit in it now."

"If I sell out," said Carroll, "will you stop on at the widow's and accept a permanent position as my stenographer?"

Two bright spots came in Elinor's cheeks, and her eyes darkened.

"No," she answered, "I will not. You don't need a stenographer, and you can't afford one. Besides, there is now another thing." Her color deepened. "It looks to me very much as if Miss Willett might be willing to reconsider her determination of two years ago. She has very likely found out that

money isn't everything, and that the chances are small of her caring for anybody else. In that case, it would not be a friendly act for me to remain. I've a good mind to go back to town tomorrow."

Carroll sprang forward in his chair, his face the picture of dismay.

"Oh, for Heaven's sake, don't do that!" he cried. "Wait at least until we finish this play."

"Well, we will see. I must go now. It's nearly lunch time."

"It's nothing of the sort."

"It doesn't matter. You're not in the frame of mind to work, and I've got some sewing to do."

She rose. Carroll got up rather sulkily.

"All right, if you would rather," said he.

"I think I would." She walked toward the door. Carroll opened it. On the threshold, Elinor turned, and looked at him with her tender smile.

"I wish you all success," she said, and held out her hand.

Carroll took it in his. Their eyes met, and the color rushed into each face. A sudden sense of impending loss swept over Carroll. He did not want her to go; he wanted her to stay indefinitely. But why he wanted this, he could not for the life of him have told.

Elinor disengaged her hand, gave him a smile and a nod, and slipped out. Carroll picked up his pipe, walked moodily to the open window, and watched the lithe, supple figure picking its way across the rickety old dam. On the other side, Elinor turned to look back, and saw him standing by the window. She waved, before disappearing in the bushes. Carroll waved back, then turned, lighted his pipe, and, taking Marjorie's letter from his pocket, read it slowly, and told himself that he was a very lucky chap.

But somehow the sight of the familiar handwriting failed to bring the old, familiar thrill. "It's from having given up all hope," he told himself, "but the Lord knows I was rattled enough when she came in yesterday."

It did not occur to Carroll that perhaps his excitement of the previous day might be due less to his meeting with Marjorie than to the unfortunate position in which Elinor was suddenly placed.

He ate his lunch in that peculiar state of nervousness which is characterized by a tremulousness of the solar plexus, and is not conducive to either appetite or easy digestion. Carroll put it down to the joyful but nervous anticipations of a lover who is not quite sure of his reception at a tryst. The taciturn but observant Riley, noticing that Carroll scarcely tasted his favorite "picked-up" codfish and baked potatoes, came to certain conclusions of his own.

As the result of these deductions, Riley was moved to break his habitual silence, for the ex-tramp, beneath his gruff exterior, was a sensitive man of exceeding shyness. Riley seldom spoke except on matters pertaining to the establishment, but Carroll had sometimes overheard him expatiating to Jeffries on philosophy and ethics.

Wherefore he was surprised when Riley, after a visible effort to turn over his engines of expression, said gruffly:

"So she's a-goin'."

"Who is going?" Carroll demanded.

"Miss Wade. The Widder Smithers told me larst night."

"Oh, she did. And when did the Widow Smithers think that Miss Wade would be leaving?"

"She said Miss Wade had just told her she might leave any day now. All broke up, *she* was."

"Who? Miss Wade?"

"No, sir. The widder. Says she don't know how she's a-goin' ter git on without her." Riley appeared to pause and pull himself together. The coarse, frizzled stubble on his forehead was drawn lower toward the heavy eyebrows which made a continuous double arc across the upper half of his bony face. His color deepened. "Don't know how we're a-goin' to, neither," he growled.

Carroll gave him a stare. "Why not?" he asked shortly.

The dogged look which Riley invari-

ably assumed when embarrassed spread over the square face.

"Well, sir," he growled, "I lived long enough to find out that menfolks ain't much account without women. That's the reason sailors and sich git ornery. Lumbermen's the same way. So'r' miners. I been all three."

Riley paused, and glared about savagely. If Jeffries had been handy, he would have kicked him out, but Jeffries had made a deep study of his master's moods and knew that active embarrassment was that most to be eschewed. Jeffries was listening to the conversation from under the piano.

"No doubt you are right," said Carroll, lighting his pipe. "But you can hardly expect Miss Wade to give up all of her own plans and stop on here for the sake of keeping us civilized. You are right when you say that a woman's influence is a good thing—for the man. The question is, is it going to be worth while for the woman?"

An infinite number of corrugations appeared on Riley's brow. The casual observer might have said that he was about to commit homicide, whereas in reality he was merely concentrating his thought.

"If a man ain't got sense enough to make it wuth a good woman's while to keep him decent," said he, "then he c'n blame himself when he goes wrong. 'Tain't every man gits the chanst," he added darkly.

"Well, Riley," said Carroll pleasantly, "that's all good, sound theory. The Widow Smithers is a lonely woman, and she's going to be a lot lonelier when Miss Wade leaves. She's not over forty, good-looking, and with a nice little property. If you are a free man, I'd advise you to think it over seriously. She seems to have taken a bit of fancy to you, I notice." He got up from the table, and started to fill his pipe.

An expression of baffled ferocity, which was really no more than embarrassed perplexity, distorted Riley's muscular face.

"I—I warn't thinkin' o' the Widder Smithers," said he thickly, while his color turned from swarthy red to a coppery brown. "I was a-thinkin' o' somebody else. Things'll be a lot different round here when a certain party's gone. Sorter keeps a man up to his mark, she does, and without tryin', neither. I been a drinkin' man all my life, and I don't say as how if you and me had been here alone—there might not ha' been times——"

"There would have been only one, Riley," said Carroll.

"Well, there ain't even been that. And I don't count on there bein'. It's all right now. But the fust week she was here she come on me one day comin' fr'm the potato cellar with a jug. She stopped and told me just what I was a-tellin' myself—on'y she put it more convincin' like. I ain't bothered it sence." Riley opened and shut his big, gnarled hands, and his face appeared to have aged. "You been a good friend to me, Mr. Carroll. You saved my karkiss fr'm the law, 'n' maybe you saved my soul fr'm hell same time. So the Widder Smithers says. And now, it seems to me, you're comin' to a crossroads like. Maybe you don't see it, but I do, and I wouldn't feel like I was doin' my part to pass on by without a word. Don't you let that young woman go, Mr. Carroll. She's your luck. I know, and the Widder Smithers knows and Jeffries knows—and the joss knows, 'cause I asked him. That's all, sir."

And Riley shambled out, his face like that of a cave man as he sights his tribal enemies.

CHAPTER II.

Carroll had not long to wait on the edge of the little lake. There came presently a vigorous yapping from the farther side of the old orchard, and he caught sight of several fox terriers tearing up and down the stone wall, apparently hunting a red squirrel. A moment later he saw a white-clad figure come through the open gate and pause.

Otis sprang up from the rock where he had been sitting. He was in white flannels with a blue serge coat, bareheaded, as was usual with him since he

had been living at the mill, and his crisp, yellow hair was sun-bleached to the color of oakum and accentuated the ruddy tan of his face. The wholesome country life with due proportion of physical and intellectual work, regular hours, and simple fare had not been without its effect even on a physique already clean of blemish. Carroll's eyes were as clear as the lake water, and his skin had the texture of an autumn leaf. Every movement told of perfectly balanced nerve and muscle.

The fox terriers discovered him first, and set up a clamor; then, seeing that he was apparently a friend, left off to continue the search for the squirrel. Marjorie saw him, and came forward eagerly, her cheeks glowing warmly, eyes bright, and a smile of welcome on her delicious mouth.

Otis met her at the foot of an ancient apple tree. She was lovelier than ever, he thought, and her presence seemed to bring back all the old emotions.

"Otis!" cried Marjorie, and offered him both hands, her beautifully shaped arms bare to the elbow.

Perhaps it was a sense of remorse for his lack of warmth at the prospect of seeing her again which led Carroll to take the small, extended hands gently in his, place them on his shoulders, and gather Marjorie into his arms. Whatever the motive, it was certainly not passion at the sight of her.

The embrace was rather that of one whose relationship permitted a certain degree of intimacy than that of a lover, and consequently Carroll was a bit startled at the ardor of the kiss which he received as her fresh lips were pressed to his. Formerly this warmth had been on his part, while Marjorie had been sweetly submissive.

Nevertheless it was a perfectly satisfactory kiss, and Carroll was about to take the initiative himself, as a man should, when Marjorie dropped her hands on his chest, and, thrusting herself at arm's length, looked up at him with tender, misty eyes.

"I hadn't counted on *this,* Otis," said she.

"Neither had I, Marjorie. But you know I told you when we parted that I could never accept you merely as a friend."

Her hazel eyes rested thoughtfully on his face. She looked away, and her breath came a little faster. Carroll had always been her masculine beau ideal in every way but one—the financial. It seemed to her that he had improved. His face was leaner and finer, and the very lack of impetuosity with which he was subconsciously reproaching himself had the effect of attracting her all the more.

"That was over two years ago, Otis," she said. "Do you really feel the same?"

"Of course I do. Do you think that I am the sort to change?"

"No," she answered softly. "But it seems hard to believe that you can still want me as much as ever."

"I shall always want you."

"And I have never ceased to want you, dear," she answered.

Carroll sighed. "There doesn't seem to be more chance of our getting what we want than there was two years ago, Margy," he said. "Less, in fact, because I'm two years older."

"But you are getting on, are you not?"

"Not appreciably. I've learned a little more about writing, but I've been living on capital, barring two or three stories sold. Now, I am getting toward the end of things."

A shadow crossed her face. "Come over here, Otis," she said. "Let's sit down on this big stone, and have a talk. I was afraid that it might be like this."

They seated themselves on the big rock. Under Marjorie's eager questioning, Carroll told her of all that had happened him since their parting. She listened attentively, especially toward the end when he described his occupation of the mill. He touched lightly on Elinor Wade, and was surprised and pleased that Marjorie did not attempt to question him about her.

"Oh, yes," was all she said. "Sam Collingwood told us her story. He was awfully cut up about it, but what could

he do when she refused all indemnity? So you have written some plays? Has anybody read them?"

"No. That's the difficulty, but I know some dramatic lights. Of course, the plays may not amount to anything."

Marjorie turned to him suddenly, and laid her hand on his.

"Listen to me, Otis," said she. "I don't want to be discouraging, but I really doubt if there is much future for you in what you are doing. Everybody knows how difficult it is to get a play put on. I hate to see you wasting the best of your youth. Would you go into business if you had a good opening?"

"No."

"Not even if—if it would give us—what we both want?"

"Oh! That's different. Like a shot. I'd do my writing in a ledger from the top of a high stool if it would bring me you."

There was no hesitation in his answer, and Carroll had no doubt of its sincerity. Neither had Marjorie. Full of her idea, she did not detect the strained note which was certainly there. She pressed the back of his hand with hers, and Carroll's turned upward to clasp and hold it.

"Otis," said she, "my godfather, Mr. Reardon, is now in Boston. He is a big promoter of a lot of enterprises, very rich, and would do anything for me. I have written him a note, which I have here. If you will deliver it and have a talk with him, I am sure that he would find you something which would enable you to get on. Will you do it?"

Carroll stared out across the lake.

"If he did," said he slowly, and without looking around, "would you marry me?"

"I will make no promise, Otis. I love you as much as I ever did; more, I think. But my views have not changed. Everything would depend on your success. Don't you see, Otis, it would be no act of love for me to marry you unless I was sure that I could make you a good wife. Honestly, dear, I don't think that I would be a success if married to a poor man. I have absolutely no idea whatever of the value of money, and I am a poor manager and quite without any of the domestic virtues. Lots of girls brought up as I have been are just the same. Only they won't admit it, but go ahead and marry poor men, and all sorts of unhappiness follows."

Carroll nodded. "I always acknowledged that you were quite right," said he. "It isn't reasonable to ask a girl who has been brought up to luxury to lose it all for the sake of getting married. It seems to me that she needs it more after marrying than before, because she's tied down to her home, and, if her husband is a business man and away all day long, it must get pretty dull for her."

Marjorie smiled, and patted his hand. "You have got a good, clear head, Otis," said she. "What a shame we aren't rich! But I'm sure that if you will go down and see Mr. Reardon, he will certainly manage to get you something, if he has to create a position outright. He is going to be in town for only two days, so you had better go down to-night on the nine-o'clock from Bakersville, and come back to-morrow afternoon. If you can get home in time to come up and call after dinner, perhaps we can manage to have a little tête-à-tête. Will you do that?"

"Yes, dear. What have you said in your letter of introduction?"

"Here it is." Marjorie took the note from her waist. "It is addressed 'Dear Uncle Jack'—but he's not really my uncle, just an old friend and classmate of dad's; Harvard, you know; so that will help you, too. Now, listen." And she read:

"DEAR UNCLE JACK: This is to introduce a very dear friend, Mr. Otis Carroll. Mr. Carroll has, at my suggestion, gone to town particularly to see you, and when he has explained to you the circumstances of the case I know that you will be able to do something.

"Surely, in some of the many big enterprises of which you are practically the head, there must be some good opening for such a man as Mr. Carroll. Please be the dear that you always are, and find something which may enable him to carry out his plans.

"With love, your devoted goddaughter,

"MARJORIE WILLETT."

"There," said Marjorie brightly, "do you think that he could resist such an appeal as that?"

Carroll did not look altogether satisfied. "It's very nice," said he slowly, "but don't you think that it leaves the real object of the request a little vague?"

"Vague?" Marjorie's clear voice raised slightly in key. "Why, what do you mean? I don't see anything vague about it. I'm surprised, Otis. I thought you would be so pleased." A hurt note crept in.

Carroll's arm slipped about her waist. "There, there, sweetheart, I'm an ungrateful brute. 'Vague' was not the word. Only"—he hesitated—"it struck me that if you were to say in so many words that you loved the unworthy bearer and wanted to marry him and couldn't do so until he got a good job, it might have had more effect."

Marjorie gently disengaged his arm. "But, Otis, dear, *you* can tell him all of that. A girl doesn't care to write about how much she loves a man, even to her godfather."

"Of course, Margy. I'm a silly chump. I'll tell him just exactly how things stand."

Marjorie leaned over, and kissed him impulsively. "That's a dear. Now, you had better be getting ready, Otis. You can catch the stage to Bakersville, but you'll have to get a trap to come back."

"I'll sling my wheel on behind the stage," said Carroll. "That's quicker than a trap and cheaper."

He leaped to his feet, and offered his hand to the girl. She sprang up lightly.

"Au revoir—and good luck, dear," said she, and offered him her lips. Carroll took her gently in his arms. It was like kissing a flower, he thought. The idea never occurred to him that, while flowers may be fresh and sweet and fragrant and were at that particular place and season everywhere obtainable, he had never yet been moved to kiss them. But when he had watched Margy and her noisy bodyguards out of sight through the gap in the stone wall and started to walk slowly back to the mill, it did occur to him that there was some lacking quality in his emotions.

He felt gloomy and depressed. The idea of going to Boston and confiding his amorous ambitions to a stranger, then asking for a position which might enable him to fulfill them, bored and irritated him. But how otherwise could he ever hope to get Marjorie with whom he was, of course, deeply in love?

But it was the thought of leaving the mill which hurt. No more early plunges in the eddying pool. No more fresh, flaky trout, flapjacks, and maple sirup. No more roomy studio with the water in the flume gurgling and chuckling beneath his feet. No more peaceful evenings sitting on the doorstep watching the waning colors in the lake and the smoke of his pipe mounting in spirals like the incense of this spacious temple where he worshiped with a full heart the God of things that grow.

He reached his little inclosure, and stood for a moment with his elbows on the fence, watching the busy hens with their promising broods of fluffy chickens and baby ducks. Jeffries came out to welcome him, and sniffed inquiringly and with hackles which raised at the scent left by the fox terriers. Carroll dropped his hand on the broad, scarred head, and a lump formed deep in his throat. He thought of how he had anticipated the golden autumn and the keen, dry winter when he would skate on the lake and fish through the ice and track hares on his snowshoes and smoke his pipe before the blazing fire——

He tried to put it all aside, and went into the house, which had suddenly assumed a new character; a nearness and dearness as of some loved one who is slipping away and will soon be gone forever. Carroll had not realized how the quaint old place had got into his blood. He loved it all, and the details had assumed that intimacy which they have for children; the spicy, pungent smell of the potato cellar and the dusty, musty one of the little attic from which

a red squirrel or two usually scampered as he shoved his head up through the trap. It smelled of squirrel, up there, and butternuts and ripening pears.

But there, on the other hand, was Marjorie—the love of his life, as he told himself with a sort of conviction so hollow that the assurances rattled around inside it and reëchoed themselves in the garrulous way of repetitions. Carroll found himself wishing that Elinor were there. She had a talent which amounted to genius for fixing relative values and making these clear to him. Carroll had often told her that he had never met a person who possessed her accurate sense of proportion, at which Elinor smiled and said that an easier name for it was "common sense."

Carroll, as one may see, was not particularly rich in this useful quality. Now, as he got himself ready for his journey, he wished so hard that Elinor were there to convince him of his good fortune that he came near forgetting to go to Boston.

Since Elinor was out of earshot, the next best thing was to write her a note explaining the situation, and this he did, and much better than he could have managed it verbally, for Carroll's mind was of the sort from which thought escapes more easily at the end of a pen. He told Elinor how happy he hoped to be, which was entirely true. Had she been there, he would have told her verbally how happy he was, and might possibly have realized that he was talking like a fool. He was in reality about as happy as a dog which is being dragged off for a nice soap bath.

In his note he also stated that he had decided to act on her advice and sell out the stock which he had been carrying on a margin, and that he begged her to reconsider her plan of leaving the following week, as he needed not only her professional services as a typewriter, but as a critic and collaborator.

He finished the note, and gave it to Riley, with instructions to deliver it that evening. Then, commending the place and its valuable contents to his faithful henchman, the ex-tramp and highwayman, he flagged the antiquated stage, to the overhanging stern of which Riley deftly slung the bicycle with a few swift sailor passes.

Carroll got a sleeper at Bakersville, and awoke at the Boston terminal. At what he judged to be the proper hour, he called upon Mr. Reardon, whom he found to be an exceedingly kind-hearted and agreeable man. So sympathetic was the promoter's manner that Carroll put aside all of his natural reserve and told him frankly the state of affairs.

Mr. Reardon listened without interruption, and his very intelligent eyes and quick brain, trained to the precise and accurate assaying of men and motives, missed no single detail from which a masterly observation could extract knowledge. Before Carroll was halfway through his story, Mr. Reardon knew the truth. Here was a straightforward young man who should really have lived about a hundred years earlier. A young gentleman whose sense of honor was such that it got away with his common sense and led him honestly to believe in a state of affairs which did not exist, but the departure from which would have so lowered himself in his own self-respect as to be quite impossible to him.

To Mr. Reardon, himself a thoroughbred, Carroll was one of the most distinguished personalities that he had ever met, and this, simply because the breed in him absolutely predominated all modern conventions. He liked and admired him from the very first dozen words that he spoke, and this made the position of the promoter all the more difficult. For he saw at once that Carroll was acting from a high-bred instinct as to what he ought to feel and do; not from what he really did feel and wanted to do.

In a word, Mr. Reardon's shrewd judgment told him that Carroll was no more in love with Marjorie than he was with the queen of the Cannibal Islands. But he had been, and he felt that he still ought to be. Wherefore, to all practical purposes, he really was.

Mr. Reardon's casuistry went farther. He reasoned that his god-

daughter was as much in love with Carroll as it was possible for her to be with anybody, but that for some reason she did not care to commit herself. Which was absolutely the case. Mr. Reardon hung his shell-rimmed spectacles on his high-bridged, masterful nose, and reread Marjorie's letter, while his heavy brows sagged like those of an old hound.

"No lawyer," he thought, "could have written it any better. The little minx wants this chap badly—but she wants money more. If he can get it for her, all right and good; if he can't, she's got somebody on her string who can."

Odd as it may appear, Marjorie did not undergo any lowering in his esteem as the result of his conclusions. This was owing to Mr. Reardon's personal attitude toward womankind. "Pussy cats all—but we can't do without 'em, confound 'em!" was his rather Ottoman point of view.

His disposition of Carroll's affair was the height of diplomacy. Ten minutes' talk sufficed to show him that Carroll had about as much actual business ability as a Knight of the Round Table.

Carroll himself had already attempted to make this fact quite clear.

"My trouble in business," said he, "is that I'm always worried about what there is in it for the other chap. Then I haven't much of a head for figures. But I've always been fairly good at running any sort of an outfit and keeping discipline and all that."

"Those jobs don't command much pay, Mr. Carroll," said Reardon. "Besides, my interests are mostly manufacturing, where the man that can run a winch is worth more than the explorer and the archæologist and the professor of classics. You see, you are not a technically trained man, and this is an age of specialists—in everything. Now, I tell you what I can do, and *will* do, if you say so. I can put you in a high-salaried position where you will be little more than a figurehead, and then hire a technically trained man for next to nothing to do the work. Marjorie would never know the difference, and you could——"

Carroll, his bronzed face swarthy, rose.

"Thank you, Mr. Reardon," said he. "It's awfully kind of you, and I must say that I am sorely tempted. But if I accepted a position of that sort, I'd—I'd never be able to look Marjorie in the face. I see just how it is, and I can't tell you how much I appreciate your kindness. But, really, it's no use ——" He stepped to Mr. Reardon, and held out his hand with a smile. "I know how horribly busy you must be, so I won't keep you any longer. Thank you, not only for your offer, but for your kind interest."

And shaking the promoter warmly by the hand, Carroll hurried from the office, leaving Mr. Reardon to smile quietly to himself, then frown.

"It's not surprising that she wants to marry him," said he to himself. "A young gentleman of an old school. He fairly bolted when I offered the mildest, most innocuous kind of graft. I wonder if she'll be woman enough to marry him, anyway, on the three or four thousand a year of her own." He shook his iron-gray head skeptically. "If she does, I'll find him a good job where he can earn his pay. The man's no fool. But the meanest trick that I could do him now would be to fling him into Mistress Marjorie's arms—h'm—they're all alike—pussy cats all—and we can't do without 'em."

Needless to say, Mr. Reardon was a confirmed old bachelor with a warm heart and a ready purse.

As for Carroll, he breathed more freely, once in the open air, than he had done since leaving his beloved sawmill.

"A nice man," he thought, "and ready to do anything for Marjorie. I like his squareness even more than his generosity. Most men wanting to do as much for a favorite goddaughter would have shunted me into the job and left me to find out for myself, when it was too late, that I had about as much right there as a plumber in paradise. It's a shame, though, that I'm such a useless dub." And he heaved a sigh which held that peculiar note of

resignation sometimes to be heard at the reading of a will.

Though little given to self-analysis, Carroll was inwardly disturbed at the lightness of his mood. He tried to tell himself that he was horribly cut up, that he might as well face the situation and admit that Marjorie was practically lost to him forever, which he did, and that with a lack of anguish which disgusted him with himself. He was finally forced to admit that his nature was more superficial than he could possibly have believed, and that Marjorie was fortunate to escape marriage with so utter a failure as himself. Also, he could hardly wait to get home and tell Elinor of his lack of success. He seemed to thrive under the girl's habit of not taking him too seriously, and he craved, without knowing it, the little look of tender amusement in her eyes when he talked to her of his affairs.

But there was still his broker to see, for he had bought a new hat, shoes, gloves, and ties, and his exchequer was in bad condition. Carroll figured that at the last quotations which he had seen, he would, on selling out his stock, have a credit of about seven hundred dollars. This quotation was several days old, for Carroll, with characteristic atony of his financial sense had bought a morning paper when he went to breakfast, then become so absorbed in what he should say to Mr. Reardon that he had forgotten to open it.

It was therefore a considerable shock when his broker, who was also a classmate and personal friend said, after their greetings were exchanged:

"Well, Otis, I was afraid this might jolt you up a little. However, I don't think there's anything to be alarmed about. There is something doing in that stuff, and my personal opinion is we're going to see it soar in a day or two. I've been gathering in a little more on my own account, and if I were you I'd do the same."

"But, good heavens," Carroll exclaimed. "I didn't come down here to buy. I came to sell out, and take what little profit there might be coming. I need the money."

The broker stared, and his jaw dropped. "Profit?" said he. "Why, haven't you seen the papers? Don't you know what the stuff is quoted at?"

"Haven't an idea. Last I saw was sixty-two and a half."

"Oh, Lord!" groaned the broker. "Have I got to break it to you, then? It's gone all off during the last two days. Go in there, and take a look at the ticker. I haven't the heart to tell you—and you in want."

Otis walked into the front office, glanced at the tape, then turned to his friend with a laugh.

"So I'm within about one hundred and fifty dollars of financial annihilation," said he. "All right. Give me the one hundred and fifty dollars."

"What? Why, you're crazy, Otis. Maybe she's hit bottom. Don't think of selling now. Scurry around and get me some more margin, and, if you've got anything that you can realize on, get it up and buy. I tell you, this stock is going to sail pretty soon. Somebody's hammering it for a purpose, and once she starts up you'll think you're watching an aëroplane. I've got some perfectly good inside information. Sell nothing!"

Otis shoved his hand in his trousers pocket, and fished out a handful of silver and crumpled bills.

"There's about twenty-five," said he, "my entire fortune. I think you'd better sell."

The broker gave him a sharp look, stood for a moment frowning, then walked back to the cashier's office. "Give me one hundred and fifty dollars, Ned," said he. "Charge it to my personal account."

The cashier counted out the money, when the young man came back to where Carroll was standing listlessly running the tape through his fingers.

"Here's your one hundred and fifty dollars, Otis," said he, "but it's a personal loan. I won't let you sell out. If the stuff keeps on dropping, and you are wiped out, so much the worse for both of us. But if you can scrape up a few hundreds from any possible source, do it, and bring the money to me."

He thrust the bills into Carroll's hand, then turned abruptly to the ticker. Carroll stood for a moment quite motionless. Then he stuffed the money into his trousers pocket.

"Thanks, old chap," he said, a little unsteadily. "Good-by!"

The broker gave his hand a hearty clasp. Carroll turned to the door, and went out.

CHAPTER III.

Carroll did not take the two-o'clock express. Instead, he made his way to a certain spacious though dingy shop, which contained a great many really valuable articles in various stages of dilapidation. The proprietor, an elderly French Jew, and an able connoisseur in his extensive line, greeted him politely.

"Do you remember," said Carroll, "that about six months ago, when you bought a few small articles in my studio, you offered me four hundred dollars for my Flemish tapestry?"

"Parrfectly, sar."

"Does the offer still hold good?"

"Parrfectly, sar."

"All right. The tapestry is now in my country studio. I will ship it down to you on Monday. This is Saturday. I will ask you to send me the money by express to this address."

"Parrfectly, sar." The dealer rubbed his hands. He knew exactly where he could dispose of the tapestry at about fifty per cent profit, and at the same time he was offering a better price than Carroll could have got at any of the pretentious furnishers.

"I may have some other stuff to offer you later," said Carroll. "I am thinking of selling all my things and going away. But you will have to come up to New Hampshire to see them."

"I am alvays at your disposition, sar," said the dealer.

"All right," said Carroll. "I'll send you the tapestry, then, on Monday," and he nodded to the old man, and went out.

In a saddened frame of mind, he took the four-o'clock train for Bakersville, arriving at about seven, when he mounted his wheel and started for home in the waning daylight.

Carroll's heart was very heavy as he pedaled through the sweet-smelling woods, now becoming hushed with the approach of night. It was not his stock losses which troubled him, although he regarded his little account as practically wiped out. What hurt him was the prospect of parting piece by piece with his dearly beloved possessions.

The furniture which he had saved from his old home did not represent to Carroll so many inanimate articles of certain relative intrinsic value. The things were his lares and penates, his household goods, which represented in a way his setting, his frame, his position in the world, almost his family. There was not a piece which was not associated with some memory or incident of the happiest epoch of his life, when the future was a rainbow of promise and such things as real worries and troubles existed only in theory.

He had no idea of following the broker's advice. Stock gambling did not interest him, nor had he the slightest faith in the prophecies of anybody connected with it, considering the whole business the veriest game of chance. He had put up his small remaining capital as marginal security at the insistence of a friend who sincerely wished to do him a real service. Carroll had done it more through appreciation of the other man's interest in his affairs than because he was either hopeful or eager for gain, and with the fixed mental reservation that if the game went against him he would take his loss and get out.

And this was precisely what he meant to do. Nothing would have induced him to put up the money he received for the tapestry. He was sick of the business, and wanted to get it out of his thoughts.

He had traveled about two miles when he reached the part of the road which mounted steeply to a cleft in the high hills, thence descended in a more gradual slope to the valley beyond. The top of this miniature pass was thickly wooded with a growth of hemlock,

which for some reason had escaped the woodsman's ax, and was a spot where tourists invariably halted to enjoy the panorama of river valley, scattered lakes, and distant, broken hills rising to a lofty range which shut in the valley from the north—the White Mountains.

As Carroll reached the summit, the twilight was fading fast. The valley below him swam in a void of soft obscurity, and beyond, where it narrowed, there hung a filmy veil of mauve, through which gleamed the river as it flowed from the dark, mysterious lakes, still shimmering with a metallic light, far away against the unreal mountains.

The sky was like an inverted bowl of amber, cloudless, but opaque, and near the earth were swirling bands of red and orange, which looked like eddies left in the wake of the swollen sun. Above these writhing wisps of color in a zone of purest yellow hung an elongated new moon, which shone as green as the eyes of the brass god.

Carroll, panting from his climb, paused to stare at this peculiar twilight, which for all its peacefulness was not quite sane.

"A Turner," he said, "and forest fires in the north. What's that?"

For as he spoke his ear had caught a rustling sound at the top of the steep bank, to the very edge of which grew the hemlock trees. Carroll glanced upward, and thought that he saw the gleam of some metallic object which gave off a golden glint. As he tried to look into the gloom, there was another rustle, and the shining object disappeared.

"Who's that?" he called sharply.

There was no answer, but it seemed to Carroll that he heard a stifled gasp, as of some creature in pain. He rolled his bicycle into the dry ditch at the side of the road, then scrambled up the bank with a rush. There was a little scurry, a smothered cry—and Carroll, to his amazement, looked down upon the crouching figure of Elinor Wade.

She was at the foot of a great hemlock, her bicycle lying on the thatch of fallen needles at her feet, and the yellow light from the sky shone dully on the nickeled handlebar. Elinor seemed huddled in a little heap. In the vague light, Carroll saw that her head was drooping and her face in her hands.

"Elinor!" he cried.

The hands dropped instantly. She lifted her head, and he saw the flash of her white teeth as she smiled. But her face looked ghastly, and there was something infinitely pathetic in her presence there, alone under the great trees, lingering in this high place after the funeral of the day.

"What are you doing here?" Carroll asked.

"I have been waiting for you to pass, to say good-by. You took a later train, didn't you?"

"Yes. But if you were waiting for me to pass, why didn't you sing out?"

"I was curious to see if you would feel me so close to you. If you had not, I would have spoken."

Carroll stared down at her under lowered brows.

"Elinor," said he, "something tells me that you are lying. I believe that you were waiting here in ambush not to see me, but to see me pass. You took advantage of my absence to run away. Just now, when I caught you, you hid your face with shame—and you ought to."

"I hate good-bys," she answered half defiantly. "I'd rather write them than say them, and I left mine in a note with Riley. People who are good friends and understand each other as well as you and I ought to be able to get along without unpleasant formalities."

"I think that you might have waited until I came back," said Carroll.

"I thought it better to go when you were away. I understood from your note that you had practically become re-engaged to Miss Willett, and no woman who is engaged to a man cares to have another woman hanging about—especially a girl in my position. How did you manage in Boston? Were you successful?"

Carroll gave a short laugh. "I was as successful as I have ever been in

anything. Mr. Reardon tried his best to fit me to one of his numerous concerns, and when that failed he offered to make me a job to measure. I declined."

"Naturally. Then what?"

"Then I went to my broker's, and found my margin in the process of being wiped out. My broker flatly declined to fill my order to sell, but loaned me one hundred and fifty dollars out of his own pocket. From there I went to see a sort of uncle of mine who is of the Franco-Hebraic persuasion and has previously advanced me money on personal effects. Also, he buys outright. I arranged for the sale of a tapestry, which does not seem to me to harmonize with the nail rust on the wall of the studio——"

"Oh, hush! And do you mean to tell me that your stock account is actually wiped out?"

"It was moribund. I did not wait for the death agony. I was in too much of a hurry to fly back to you for sympathy. And this is what I get. I catch you bolting off without a word, hiding in the bushes until I get past."

"I am sorry. It never occurred to me that you might fail to find a good position. And the possibility of your losing all your money never entered my head. If it had, I never should have run away. I was sure that you would come back happy and triumphant with your future all rosy. And it really seemed to me that the kindest thing that I could do for you was to go away."

"Oh—did it?" answered Carroll dryly, and dropped down on the aromatic balsam at her side. This brought his face closer to hers, and even in the murk he could see that it was slightly streaked as if from tears.

"Have you been crying?" he demanded.

"No—that is, a little, perhaps. The sunset always makes me feel that way —and it was so gorgeous. Tell me some more about your stock."

"Oh, hang the stock! I want to know about *you.*" His voice was almost rough, but it held a deep, vibrant quality which was not altogether steady. "Why did the sunset make you cry, Elinor?"

"Oh—how do I know?" She threw him a quick look, then seemed to catch her breath. "It—it was rather emotional. I don't often blub, but this was a blue moment. I have been happy up here. But that is all over now. I am all right. Tell me about your plans." She was talking fast and breathlessly. "You are not going to give up in despair, are you? It's absurd to suppose that there are not plenty of good positions you could fill. What are you going to do now?"

"Elinor," said Carroll gently, "I had intended to ask for your sympathy and advice. But now that you have tried to desert me, I shall do nothing of the sort."

"But I didn't try to desert you. How can you desert a person upon whom you have no claim? Don't be silly. I simply went off, and left you to your fiancée."

Carroll reached over, and took one of the small, firm hands. Elinor started back as if she had been struck, then tried to wrench it free, but, strong girl as she was, found the effort like jerking at one of the hemlocks.

"Listen to me," said Carroll, almost sternly. "Miss Willett is *not* my fiancée. She never will be my fiancée. She has declined to commit herself to anything definite, even in the very slightest degree, even while she asks me to turn my life topsy-turvy and attempt to be what I am the very least fitted for—a business man. If I were to succeed, she might some day consent to marry me. If I failed, she would sweetly and sadly give me up. It's taken me a long while to get all of this through my fool head, but it came at last; just now, while I was walking up the hill and running over in my mind what she would probably say when I told her how I stood. I know it so well that I don't think that I shall even take the trouble to tell her."

He paused. Elinor did not speak. Her hand was still crushed, though not painfully as at first, in his. She had stopped her ineffectual struggling.

"And now I will tell you another thing which I discovered at about the same time," Carroll resumed abruptly. "I don't love Miss Willett. I don't even like her. I would be very happy if I thought that I was never going to see her again."

"Otis Carroll!"

"That is shameful, but true. After all, why should I, unless simply for her physical beauty? Looking back, I cannot remember a single time when she has made the slightest personal sacrifice of any kind for me. I really doubt if such an idea ever entered her head. And in spite of all that, because I am a dreamy, idealizing sort of fool, I have fancied myself in love with her. Even after leaving Mr. Reardon when I felt as if I was walking on clouds because I had failed, I was ashamed of being so light-hearted. I thought that it must be because I was such an unambitious chump and preferred to potter around my old mill rather than to marry a society belle and get on in the world. But what I really felt gay about was that now things might go on as they were before. Like a fool, I failed to realize how the whole thing was bound to crumble without the keystone. But I realize it now."

Both were silent for what might have been almost any throbbing lapse of time. The woods were hushed and breathless. The last late woodpecker had given his final tap; the last squirrel his good-night chatter. Up from the valley floated thin, distant sounds, which seemed to come from another world, and the mist which was rapidly inundating the river had broadened it to the vague, ethereal ghost of some prehistoric stream. The sky had darkened to a velvety purple, across which stars were sewn and the green moon had grown in size and exchanged its color for greater light.

Carroll's voice broke the soft quiet.

"The brass god was right," said he. "It was *you* I most needed—and most need. Riley was right." He turned and tried to look into her face. "Have you never felt my tremendous need of you?" he asked.

She did not answer. Carroll could hear her breath coming and going tremulously. He put his arm about her shoulders.

"You are the keystone, Elinor darling," he said. "You must not go. I love you, and need you, and you need me. I've been a fool, sweetheart, but I know now. Don't you care?"

"Otis—I adore you—I loved you from the first."

Carroll leaned down, and crushed his lips against the murmuring ones. Her arms struggled free, and slipped up to twine about his neck and draw him closer. High over head, the hemlock tops nodded and whispered to a little breeze which wafted in the night.

The creaking of the ancient stage as it swayed up the slope behind its sinewy mountain team brought the two back from Arcady to a sense of their surroundings.

Elinor freed herself with a little sigh.

"Here comes the stage," said she, "and my trunk on it."

"A good place for it," said Carroll. "*My* luggage is already in Bakersville."

"Oh, my dear——"

"No demurs, if you please. We will give that antiquated bus time to get there; then we will follow on our wheels, go straight to the Presbyterian parsonage, and the Reverend Mr. Holbrook shall marry us as quickly as such a tremendous job can be performed."

"But—Otis, darling—hadn't you better wait?"

"No, ma'am. I had not. What's more, I won't. I've waited all summer to find out what an ordinary chump would have known at the end of an hour. Do *you* feel like waiting?"

Elinor's answer was satisfying, so far as it went.

"Besides," said Carroll, "what the dickens is there for us to wait for? We can't be much poorer than we are now."

"So far as the goods of this world go."

"Understood, of course. We are each quite alone in the world."

"But think of your friends—and my position."

"As Mrs. Carroll? I love to think of it."

"And Miss Willett. You ought to see her first. Really, Otis, you must."

"Not a bit of it. If she had committed herself to anything, I would, of course. But she left herself absolutely free, even in case of my success, let alone my failure. I don't see why it shouldn't cut both ways. Her option expired about an hour ago. Now, suppose you tell me the truth about what led you to hide from me?"

"I couldn't bear to hear you talk about marrying another woman. I knew, of course, that you didn't love her."

"Oh, you did."

"Of course. Anybody could see that. It's a wonder she didn't see it herself. Your note just about finished me, and I made up my mind to go before you came back. The temptation to steal you was too great. I knew that you cared for me, deep down, and I felt your need of me."

"My word! A modest young person, my bride-elect."

"Otis—you frighten me to death. Do you think it wise——"

"The only flash of wisdom I have ever displayed. Well, to go on?"

"I wrote you a note, and took it over to give to Riley." She gave her low-pitched, gurgling laugh.

"And what did Riley say?"

"He glared as if he were going to beat my head in with his ax—for I found him chopping wood under the shed. When I gave him the note and told him that I was going away, his face grew so awful that I was actually scared. Jeffries gave him a good look, and started for the cellar."

"Intelligent animal."

"Then Riley, after a sort of convulsion, started in to tell me that you—you cared for me, without realizing it."

"I'll give him a raise—if ever I get the money."

"He implored me not to go, and practically forbade my going until you got back. He said: 'Why, even that there heathen joss knows as how Mr. Carroll couldn't git along without you, miss.' Now, his speaking of Feng-shui reminded me of the odd things that have happened, so I thought I'd see what he had to say on the subject. I told Riley to put him on the piano stool, which he did. Then I said: 'Feng-shui, where is that of which I stand in greatest need?' But Riley interrupted with: 'Your Highness, where shall the young lady find what's best for all hands?' "

"Good old Riley."

"Then he gave him a spin, and Feng-shui stopped, with his green eyes staring straight toward Bakersville. Even Riley was shaken, and said something under his breath that wasn't a hymn of praise for the idol. But he stopped trying to persuade me, and went into the house without a word. He wouldn't say good-by, nor so much as look at the bill I offered him."

"Poor old Riley. What did you do then?"

"I went back to Mrs. Smithers, and packed my trunk, which she promised to send on the stage, paid my bill, said good-by to everybody, and started off on my bicycle. That was quite early, as I wanted to get here before you passed and—and watch you as you went down the hill. You see, I expected you on the earlier train, but you didn't come, so I thought I'd rather wait here, anyhow, than at Bakersville. Mrs. Smithers had put me up a nice supper. But I couldn't eat—and the sunset was so gorgeous, and I felt so tired, that I decided to wait for the stage. When you came, I had to clap my hand over my mouth to keep from calling out—and——"

Her breath failed. She hid her face against his shoulder.

And again the chaperoning hemlocks began to nod and whisper.

CHAPTER IV.

Mr. William Riley, ex-sailorman and hobo, glared through the shuttered window after the retreating form of Elinor Wade.

"There," he growled, "there goes all the luck o' this outfit. Mr. Carroll's a-goin' to find things some different now."

Jeffries, crouched at the bottom of the cellar steps with one ear cocked forward, caught the changed inflection of his master's voice. There was no danger in the philosophic mood, so the intelligent animal crept up the steps, and entered the kitchen, where he took up a strategic position under the settle. If Riley were to become sentimental, he could not kick Jeffries without danger of barking his shins. Riley never beat the dog. Such chastisement as he found desirable for Jeffries' discipline and his own soul's good was always administered with his foot. At first, Carroll had been disposed to put a stop to this, but, observing that Riley went about his duties in carpet slippers, he did not interfere.

Jeffries took pleasure in Riley's philosophic orations, and Riley found it more stimulating, mentally, to hold forth to Jeffries than to the kitchen furniture. Rumbling to himself like the approach of a distant storm, he dropped into a chair, lighted his corncob pipe, rested his carpet-slippered feet upon the window sill, and glared at Jeffries, who had come out from under the settle and was crouched just inside the doorsill, his muscular body straight, one ear up and one lopping, and his bright, intelligent eyes fixed upon his master's face. Jeffries had that peculiar trait, rare in dogs, of meeting the human eye without shifting his gaze. If a stranger stared too long, he would begin to growl and bristle.

Riley took a few puffs; then, with the bowl of his pipe held between a thumb and thick forefinger, he pointed the stem at Jeffries.

"Some men," said he, "c'n have the l'arnin' o' Dan'l Webster and yet be shy the common sense of a passel o' gillymots."

Jeffries never blinked. His expression appeared to say: "How intensely interesting!"

"Now," Riley continued, "here's Mr. Carroll. He's a lit'r'y man; writes books and plays describin' the lives and doin's o' make-believe folks. He p'ints out in his story how some young feller meets up with a girl and finds out he can't git along without her and somethin' henderin' their gittin' spliced; he turns to, and sets all hell upside down to git her. Then he does git her, and everything's fine and daisy."

"Most gratifying," was Jeffries' silent comment. Riley sucked at his pipe.

"In spite o' that," he resumed, "look at Mr. Carroll hisself. The whitest man ever drew breath and him gittin' more and more attached to the finest young woman I ever see. And she settin' in the stoo-dio right alongside him like a tug fast to a barge and then him a-lettin' her cast off her warps and leave him a-driftin' around in the stream—and she a-goin'——"

"You appall me," Jeffries seemed to say.

"'Tain't good sense." Riley's heels slipped off the window sill, and his feet hit the floor with a slam. Jeffries shot backward about a foot; then, seeing that the noise was accidental, resumed his position on the very edge of the steps. Under pretense of hearing something outside, he glanced back over his shoulder, accurately fixing in his mind the course to the cellar door.

"It's a outrage," said Riley, glaring at the dog. "I never see two such fools. What's to hender them gittin' spliced, all shipshape and proper and livin' here happy and peaceful with me and you?"

"Nothing that I can think of," assented Jeffries.

"Miss Wade, she's a author, too. She can knock the stuffin' out o' that there typewriter, and, when she ain't here, Mr. Carroll, he's uneasy as a widder at a weddin' feast. Mrs. Smithers, she looks at it like I do."

"It is greatly to be deplored," Jeffries seemed to say.

"Helenthunder!" Riley sprang up, scowling. Jeffries shot straight backward, clearing the two low steps and executing a half turn. Then, observing that his master's wrath was not to be vented on himself, he looked down the road and barked. There was nothing down the road.

Riley's square bulk lurched to the door, scuffled down the steps, and start-

ed for the shed, Jeffries taking a fixed position on his port quarter with a five-yard interval. Opposite the brass god, which still squatted on the piano stool, Riley paused.

"It's all your fault, you pot-bellied, swivel-eyed sweep," said he sourly. "Why couldn't you ha' looked at the house? What good you ever done here, I'd like to know? And me burnin' joss sticks and sp'ilin' ye on fish and rice. Cuss ye, anyhow!" And in a sudden access of spite, he dealt the idol a kick with his slippered foot.

Jeffries looked pleased. "An excellent idea," he observed. He detested the idol, and seldom passed it without a growl, especially if the green eyes were turned in his direction.

Under the impetus of Riley's kick, the idol turned one time and a half, stopping with his back to the irate man. Riley was about to lift him off the stool and return him to his proper place, when his eyes happened to follow the gaze of the god. This was fastened on the door of the potato cellar, with a sort of leering suggestion.

Riley straightened up, and stared at the padlocked door, beyond which was the delicious compound of rum, cider, and wintergreen, which Carroll was wont to serve out so sparingly. Riley felt a sudden itching in his throat.

"Hunh!" he growled, then scratched his chin and repeated, in a lower key: "Hunh!"

He turned and glared at the brass god. "Tryin' to get me into trouble, ain't ye?" he snarled. "Well, ye won't."

He walked to the shed, picked up the ax, and set himself to his interrupted occupation of splitting wood. For about twenty minutes, he worked violently, then paused, straightened up, wiped his forehead on the back of his sleeve, and stared at the door of the potato cellar.

"Kinder muggy," he muttered to himself. "Sky's yaller as a man with janders. Must be smoke in the air. Sorter gits in a feller's throat."

As if to further tantalize him, Jeffries got up, panting, walked to a half-filled pan of water which was in front of a chicken coop, and drank noisily.

"Git out o' that!" snarled Riley, and hove a billet of wood at the dog. Jeffries fell back behind the chicken coop.

"There," said Riley, suddenly struck by a luminous thought. "Mr. Carroll, he's went off, and never thought to leave me out my ration."

For Carroll allowed his henchman a pint of the beverage twice daily.

Riley scratched his chin. "I know he didn't do it a purpose," said he, "so why wouldn't it be all right fer me to deal it out myself?"

He sauntered casually to the door of the potato cellar, and looked it over.

"I could bend down one o' them gudgeons a mite," said he, "and lift that there door right off. No one's goin' to know the difference, and I won't take no more than the ration what was due me."

A few taps with the back of the ax bent down the rusty socket of the hinge enough to enable him to dismount the door. Riley stepped inside, and sniffed with relish the damp, delicious odor which greeted his nostrils. Going to the kitchen, he procured a jug, and drew what he roughly estimated to be his midday allowance, then stepped to the door, and looked at the brass god.

"Here's to everlasting punishment with ye, old cat's eyes," said he, and drank off the contents of the jug without drawing breath.

The eyes of the god seemed to snap and glitter. Riley wiped his mouth on his sleeve, went out, rehung the door, and, knocking the hinge back into place, resumed his wood-splitting. Half an hour passed. The day grew, if anything, more sultry, if one were to judge by the way the wood-splitter perspired, while the smoky quality of the air appeared to intensify. Riley straightened up again with a wistful look toward the potato cellar. Suddenly he slapped his thigh.

"Seein' as Mr. Carroll wa-an't here to-day," said he, "what's the matter with my havin' his ration? That keeps the daily 'lowance jes' right."

No sooner conceived than acted upon.

Again the socket of the hinge was bent down, the door unshipped, and the daily balance brought to its proper level. Riley went out, secured the door in its closed position, and resumed his work.

But, contrary to the usual custom, as the shadows lengthened the day grew still more torrid. Riley wearied of cutting wood, and, laying down his ax, restored the idol to his place on the grindstone.

"You *hev* got a little sense, old sport," said he more amiably, as he turned to replace the piano stool in the studio. But on his return, it seemed as if the whole outer world had in some miraculous way retreated behind the door of the potato cellar. Riley could see nothing else. He paused and scratched his rough chin, while the door of the potato cellar loomed large and mocked him. As Riley stood puzzling this phenomenon, he was struck by a sudden awful thought.

"Blessed if I hain't left the jug in there!" said he. "That'll never do."

He hurried to the shed, grabbed up the ax, knocked down the hinge socket, unshipped the door, and entered. But as his hand fell on the jug, another inspiration seized him.

"What's the matter of my takin' tonight's ration now, while I'm het up and thirsty—stid o' gittin' it later when I'm cool and don't need it so much," said he to himself. "I'll tell Mr. Carroll he needn't drawr none for me, as it's too hot."

Excellent idea. The evening ration was drawn forthwith. Carroll was in the habit of filling two pint beer bottles, but Riley let it flow directly into the jug, approximating the pint with his eye, yet conscientiously trying to avoid serving himself a scant measure. It is possible that with each ration his conception of a pint may have increased.

This time he drank more slowly and with the appreciation which comes after the first thirst is slaked and the palate has a better opportunity of performing its function. The decoction was one part New England rum to three parts hard cider, flavored with wintergreen and deliciously cool. As Riley was now on his third generous pint, the stimulant was beginning to make itself pleasantly felt.

With the jug still about a quarter full, Riley stepped out, walked to the grindstone, where squatted the brass god, and set the jug between the idol's knees.

"Have a sniff o' that, old joss," said he; "maybe it might buck ye up a mite."

He returned to the potato cellar, rehung the door, and with blows not entirely accurate started to knock the hinge back into place. But, alas, soft iron, especially when rusty, cannot be repeatedly bent and straightened like a piece of lead pipe. As Riley was administering the final tap, the whole hinge broke short off, leaving a telltale stump of fresh metal.

Riley stepped back, appalled.

He could think of no way of repairing the wretched thing. The hinge was old and rusty, of a peculiar shape, and about four times the size necessary to support the plank door. Riley stared at it in consternation, and there crossed his mind what Carroll had said when Riley had confessed that if it had not been for Miss Wade, "there might ha' been times——"

"There would have been only one time, Riley," Carroll had said, and Riley, who was a shrewd judge of men, felt this to be the truth.

A sudden rage possessed him, and he turned to the brass god.

"Now ye've done it, ye slant-eyed hypo-cryte," he bawled. "Ye've made me turn down the first man that ever give me a square deal—and it's goin' to cost me the only good job I ever c'u'd 'a' held." A sudden sob strangled his thick voice, and the water gushed into his reddening eyes. Ashamed of this emotion, he cursed hoarsely, and reached for the jug which he had left on the grindstone at the god's feet. But as he raised it to his lips, the jug slid through his fingers, fell, struck the head of the joss, and broke into a dozen pieces, deluging the idol with the "stone fence."

For an instant, Riley stared, aghast. To his befuddled senses, it seemed as if

the god had actually knocked the jug out of his hands, so that his first instinct was one of fright. But with primitive natures rage is usually associated with fear, and hot on the heels of his superstitious shock came a wild and reckless fury.

"You will, will ye?" he roared. " 'Tain't enough that ye got to send off Miss Wade and lead me into trouble and put things on the bum, gener'l, but yet gotter spill my drink; ye——"

Riley's half-weeping torrent of deep-sea malediction wound up with an inarticulate roar of rage. Perhaps it was with some vague recollection of a gory justice which he had once seen meted out to a band of Chinese pirates in Canton on the Chinese New Year that he sprang for his ax, swung it aloft, and brought it down with a sweeping cut across the back of the neck of the unfortunate god.

Riley had once been a skilled hand in a Wisconsin lumber camp, and knew how to handle an ax, but he was nevertheless startled at what occurred. For the head of the idol was shorn cleanly from the shoulders, and that with such violence that it flew up through the branches of the apple tree, to fall upon a large, flat stone near the entrance gate.

But Riley, though startled, was not discouraged, nor was his berserk fury in any way diminished. Howling like a madman, he turned the ax in his hands, and with the blunt head proceeded to hammer the body into a shapeless mass. Nor did he give over until the force of his blows broke the grindstone in half, when the shapeless chunk of metal slipped down to rest upon the soft earth, thus offering but slight resistance to his violence. Then Riley paused, stared for a moment at his handiwork, and flung aside the ax. His exertions and their result had quite sobered him.

"When the boss sees this business and that there broken hinge, it'll be all up with this piker," he growled. "He told me onct that if ever he caught me swipin' licker he'd fire me—and his kind makes good. Guess I might as well lap up another drink and hit the grit."

He shambled to the kitchen in search of another drinking vessel. And here, the evil genius which lurks in rum whispered its base suggestion.

"You're nothing but a low-down bum and hobo," it said. "Everybody's against you. Mr. Carroll only took you in because he needed you himself. Now, you've got to hit the pike, so why not help yourself to some of this loose stuff? There's the price of many a drink in that glass case in the studio, and the chances are the things will never be missed out of all that loose junk."

Riley, thus tempted, fell for the evil counsel. He slunk into the studio, opened the unlocked vitrine, and selected at haphazard what looked to be of the most intrinsic value: little silver boxes, a jade bracelet, some carvings in antique ivory, and small pieces of cloisonné. Although valuable, the booty with which he stuffed his pockets would not have brought him over twenty-five dollars in a pawnbroker's.

There was a sound in the doorway, and Riley started with fright, and turned with a purple face, bleary, bloodshot eyes, and shaking knees. Jeffries was watching him from the threshold. The dog's ears were drooping, his tail tucked between his bulging thighs, and he looked as much ashamed as if he were the one to be taken red-handed.

"Git out!" snarled Riley, and the congested color deepened.

He stole out of the room, then went to the loft to slip on his boots and make a small bundle of his effects. Jeffries followed, slinking and wretched and keeping out of reach of hand and foot.

"Come on," growled Riley; "it's time you and me hit the grit. *We* ain't got no more business here."

He shambled out, and headed for the potato cellar, his bundle in one hand and the pitcher in the other. But, alas for the improvident ways of the sot! In securing his last ration, he had not been careful to close entirely the spigot, and the keg, tilted up at its far end, had

slowly drained itself dry. Of the stone fence naught remained but the maddening odor from the moist soil underfoot.

"Blarst me," roared Riley, "if this here ain't the larst straw."

Cursing under his breath, he tramped heavily to the gate, and took the cross-road. Jeffries, who was following dejectedly at his heels, stopped with a plaintive whine.

"Come on, you Jeff!" snarled Riley. "It's the pike fer ourn. We don't live nowhere no more."

He could not trust himself to look back. His free hand swung against the plunder in his pocket, and he snatched it away as if it had touched a hot coal. The results of his indiscretion had fairly sobered him, and as he trudged down the dusty road it seemed as if he could think of nothing but Carroll's face when he should get home and find what had happened. Riley's throat began to swell, and he was conscious of a strained feeling around his eyes. Riley was, as has been said, under his rough husk a most emotional man.

At the end of half a mile, he missed Jeffries. Riley stopped, and looked back. A hundred yards behind him, the dog was standing in the middle of the road, stock-still and looking over his shoulder.

Riley, gazing in the same direction, caught a glimpse of the gray roof of the mill and the kitchen chimney with the disfiguring patch of cement, which he had himself applied. A sob choked in his throat, and the water gushed into his eyes. He turned resolutely away.

"If Jeff wants to go back, he kin," muttered Riley. "*He* ain't stole no licker and smashed no joss and—and stole some other things."

He turned away, and resumed his tramp. But the next moment there came from behind the scurry of feet, and here was Jeffries frisking foolishly about him; frisking out of all decorum, and that with a gayety and playfulness which was so evidently "bluff" that even Riley was forced to give a grim smile.

Said Jeffries, in those obvious actions which speak so much louder than words: "Pretending to go away, wern't we? Well, that's all right, but it's pretty hot for joking. Let's chuck it and go back."

For a moment, Riley stared at the dog. Then he turned slowly in his tracks.

"You're right, matey," said he. "Let's wait and git fired—like white folks."

CHAPTER V.

Mr. and Mrs. Carroll descended from the Bakersville stage, when the bridegroom lustily lifted his voice to summon William Riley. No Riley appearing, the recent benedict hauled the luggage and bicycles to the side of the road, and the stage rattled off, old Ames, the driver, twisting about in his seat to fling back hearty expressions of good will.

Carroll's next important act was to kiss the bride. To him, thus usefully engaged, came Jeffries. The faithful animal approached with his body in an arc, his progress sideways, with the concave part of him presenting. Within six feet of the bridal pair, he flung himself upon his side, his mouth drawn up in a grin, and finished the distance to their feet propelled by the kicking of his hind legs, while shrill small pipings issued from his muzzle.

Elinor and Carroll stooped to acknowledge these greetings, then looked up to see Riley picking his way across the dam.

"He's been over calling on the widow," said Carroll.

Riley approached slowly, and as he drew near they observed that his face was pale and wore the homicidal expression, which in him was associated with extreme embarrassment. The expanse of skin between the bushy eyebrows and the low tonsure of iron-gray hair was scarcely of a finger's breadth, while the set of his jaws suggested the operator of an inquisition torture chamber. Jeffries, catching a glimpse of his face, strategically placed Elinor between his master and himself.

At sight of Elinor, Riley's murderous

visage assumed the expression of the condemned on his way to the gallows. Carroll was looking at him curiously, and, as if receptive of a psychic wave, his glance traveled to the door of the potato cellar, which Riley had not considered it worth his while to close. The ex-tramp observed the slight lifting of Carroll's eyebrows.

"Yes, sir," he growled, "I done it."

"I'm sorry, Riley," said Carroll. "I thought that I could trust you."

"I ain't to be trusted," said Riley. "I done a lot worse than steal licker." His face grew fearful. "I got mad at the joss, and beat him into a chunk. Then I——"

"Never mind," said Carroll sharply. "We won't talk about that now. No matter what you may have done, we will let it pass this time in honor of the occasion. Riley, this is my wife, Mrs. Carroll."

Riley's deep-set eyes pushed forward in their heavily boned sockets.

"Wha—what's that, sir?" he cried.

"We have been married," said Carroll. "Now, get the luggage into the house."

Riley stared for an instant, then the tears gushed into his eyes.

"God bless ye, ma'am!" growled Riley, looking down.

"Thank you, Riley," said Elinor, and offered him her hand. But Riley drew back.

"I ain't fitten to take it, ma'am—but God bless you both." A sob choked him, and he made a rush for the luggage, pausing en route to kick automatically at Jeffries, who was at a discreet distance.

Carroll frowned. "Riley has been on the loose," said he. "What was that he said about the brass god?"

His question was unanswered, for Elinor had grasped him by the wrist and was staring at something to their right.

"Look there!" she cried.

On a large, flat stone which lay in the full blaze of the sun there glowed a round, metallic object about the size of a croquet ball. A single glance revealed it as the head of the brass god, resting upright upon its truncated neck. The profile was presented to them, and the flat features looked as though drawn down into a grimace of disgust.

"Heavens!" gasped Carroll, "if he hasn't gone and sawed off his blooming head. Now, what peculiar drunken impulse ever possessed him to do that? Hold on—I know. It was the Feng-shui's advice to you to take the Bakersville road." He glanced into the face of his bride, and smiled. "I can hardly blame Riley for that, can I?"

"Don't blame him at all," said Elinor. "He feels badly enough already. But it is rather tough on the god—when he did it all for the best."

They walked slowly toward the gleaming head. Carroll stopped, and regarded it contemplatively.

"It's too bad," said he. "I had it in my mind to consult him about my finances. He's done so well for us so far that I was sure he might put me next to something."

"Ask him, anyway," Elinor suggested.

"After the way he's been treated? I'd be afraid. He might steer me into a deadfall."

"It wasn't our fault. Here, let me ask him." She turned to the small, round head. "Feng-shui, we are sorry for what has happened, and assure you that it was through no fault of ours. Will you now kindly indicate to my husband, my darling husband, whom I love more than——"

"Hold on," said Carroll, "you will get his mind off the job."

"Hush! My splendid, glorious husband, which way he shall turn to mend his undeservedly low financial condition."

"That ought to get some action," said Carroll. "Does he appear interested?"

They stepped in front of the decapitated head, and looked into the mischievous face. The sun was streaming full against the jade eyes, the pupils of which were represented by concavities cut in the clear green stone. These depressions, although in the center of the elliptical eyeballs, had the faculty of refracting the light in such a manner as

to appear actually to turn and to direct their gaze with a peculiar intensity and significance. Thus in the present case, although the head of the god was facing the road, the eyes themselves seemed to be looking fixedly downward and to the left.

Elinor and Carroll, following this stare, observed the broken grindstone and the metallic mass between the fractured halves.

"He's looking at his own remains," said Carroll. "I take that to mean that he first wants revenge. Let's see what Riley did to the rest of him."

Followed by Elinor, he walked to the foot of the apple tree, and picked up the misshapen mass which had formerly been the body of the god. It was very heavy, and battered out of all recognition. Carroll deposited it on a piece of the grindstone, and stared at it curiously.

"Look!" he cried; "that's funny!"

"What's funny?" asked Elinor.

"See this body. It's all knocked out of shape."

"I should say it was. Riley must have had a wonder."

"Riley be hanged—as very likely he may be some day. But look here, Elinor, don't you notice something queer about this chunk?"

"It looks yellower where it has been hammered—and it's partly hollow, isn't it?"

Carroll sprang to his feet, and ran to where the head was resting on the stone, picked up the globular object, and, turning it upside down, carefully examined the severed neck. Elinor, watching him with amusement, noticed as he looked up that his face had suddenly turned pale beneath its ruddy tan, while his very blue eyes looked almost black.

"Otis—what is it?"

"Look at this," said Carroll, in a queer, strained voice, and she saw that his hand was shaking. "Look at this neck. It has not been sawed; it's been cut—at one blow." He stared at her wildly. "Elinor, as sure as I'm standing here, this idol is not brass—but gold."

"Otis!" She sprang to her feet. "Are you crazy?"

He dropped on his knees beside the body mass, and examined it swiftly and in silence. Elinor crouched beside him. Suddenly Carroll turned to her, his face paler than before and his eyes all pupils.

"Elinor, this stuff is pure gold. See how it scratches—look at that color, rich as butter. And feel the weight of the head; hollow, too. This thing came from a temple in Pekin. It was loot. You can see that the outside has had a wash of gilt or something, no doubt to give it a brassy look when the priests saw that the place was going to be captured. Elinor, sweetheart, there's not a doubt of it. This is gold; rich, Oriental gold."

"Otis—Otis!" Elinor flung her arms about her husband's neck. Carroll turned from one idol to the other, and grabbed his bride in his arms. It was this tableau which presented itself to the eyes of the repentant Riley, who had been hastily putting a few extra flourishes about the house, and was now trying to muster courage to come forth and explain the psychology of his crime.

But the harrowing sight of the young couple mourning in each other's arms the destruction of their household god was too much for the ex-tramp. Riley slumped down on the flour barrel.

"If only I'd 'a' knowed it," he muttered hoarsely. "If only I'd 'a' knowed that them two was gittin' married afore I ruined him—and him the handsomest joss I ever see, with them green eyes and all."

He sneaked to the shuttered window for another peep. But meanwhile the newly wed had sufficiently recovered from their shock to examine things from a practical point of view.

"What do you suppose he's worth?" asked Elinor.

"Oh, I don't know. He must weigh close on to a hundredweight—h'm—figuring roughly and allowing for possible alloy, I would value him at about fifteen thousand to eighteen thousand dollars, or thereabouts."

Elinor sprang to her feet, and proceeded to do an improvised skirt dance. As she danced she sang, while Jeffries, who had found much more to pleasure him in the society of the young people than in that of his remorse-bitten master, gamboled awkwardly after the bride with feinted growlings and snappings at her flying feet.

It was this spectacle which greeted Riley's eyes as he looked out for the second time. His face brightened.

"Now, there's the kind of a wife for a man," he muttered. "Takes misfortun' gay and light-hearted, *she* does. Pretends like the destruction of a val'-able brass joss ain't nothin' at all. I reckon this 'u'd be a good chance for me to go out and tell 'em how it come about."

A tide of happy fortune can be just as cumulative as that of bad. Up to this epoch of their lives, Elinor and Carroll had both suffered rather more at the hands of Fate than would have seemed their due. But at last the tide had turned.

The brass god was promptly converted into good gold coin—which, while ungrateful on the face of it, was no more than the carrying out of his own directions. No doubt it was for the best in other ways, as one can never tell the possible result of a pagan idol in a Christian household.

Of the profit accruing from the melted idol, one-third went promptly into the hands of Carroll's broker friend. This step was the result of the broker's earnest advice and the inspired suggestion of Mrs. Carroll.

"Our luck is going strong, Otis," said she. "Let's back it for this last spin, and forever afterward keep out."

Wherefore Carroll bought freely and on a margin the stock which had once already sapped his financial strength, getting it a point or two below his previous bursting point. This he achieved none too soon, as his own purchase appeared to tip the scale and start the security on its upward flight. The rise was swift and lofty, and within a week's time Carroll had taken his profits and retired from active business a man of extremely modest but independent income.

The whole affair was rather breathless, and Carroll in his mad scamper for Boston with a bride tucked under one arm and a valise containing about a hundredweight of solid gold god under the other quite overlooked the fact of Marjorie. In the excitement of the following week, he continued to overlook her until one day he ran plump into her as he was rushing to his hotel. Had he been less embarrassed himself, he might have discovered that Marjorie was more so.

"Otis," she murmured, after the first incoherent greetings, "do say that you forgive me."

"For what?" he asked bluntly, being at the moment in a tearing hurry to get back to his bride.

Marjorie's amber-colored eyes opened very wide.

"Do you mean to say," she faltered, "that you haven't seen the announcement of my engagement to Mr. Collingwood?"

"Eh—no," said Otis, fidgeting and distrait. "I—I've been rather busy—eh, a thousand congratulations."

"Otis, dear," said Marjorie plaintively, "*don't* be so bitter. When you failed to come to me after seeing Mr. Reardon, I guessed that it was bad news, and called him up on the phone and learned that everything had fallen through. Then I—I rather lost courage—especially as you didn't come—and Sam was so pressing——"

"Yes—quite so—will you excuse me if I——"

"Otis, you *must* let me finish. You see, a girl in my position has just *got* to think of her future——"

"I thoroughly agree with you," said Otis heartily, and glanced up at a clock across the street.

Marjorie, noticing some peculiar quality in his tone, looked at him directly for the first time.

"Why—you look actually pleased," she cried, astonishment and resentment startling her out of her self-control.

"Indeed I am," answered Otis, and

his smile grew cynical. "I am more than pleased. I am delighted to learn of your happiness. And I know that you will be happy to learn that my own affairs are better. I have unexpectedly come into some money, which makes me quite independent."

In spite of her social training, Marjorie found it quite impossible to disguise the emotion aroused in her by this piece of news.

"Otis," she cried, and her mouth appeared to harden. *"When?"*

"About a week ago," he answered. "And now I must really ask you to excuse me, as I have got to catch the two-o'clock for Bakersville, and my wife is waiting for me inside."

"Your—*what?*" Passers-by turned to look at Marjorie.

"My wife. Elinor Wade and I were married a week ago."

THE END

IN ALEXANDRIA

IN Alexandria, Virginia, the people—even the bartenders—are kind and trusting. Everybody believes in everybody else, and each person knows that every other person is closely related to the first family in the State. The life of the town is a calm and happy mixture of genealogy, conversation, and work.

Into this pleasant atmosphere there came one day a man named Garrison, who made his first stop at a saloon, and introduced himself with this observation:

"I find it impossible to reform. Total abstinence is as difficult as drinking lemonade through a wire."

After that he said he was related to all the best people, that he had come to Alexandria to rest in the shadow of George Washington's home, and that he always made it a rule to have his drinks charged to him, and to pay for them in a lump sum at the end of each week.

He was a polite man, the politest man who had ever set foot in Alexandria, and the graceful wave of his right hand was worth a ten-dollar note. The barkeeper gave him all the credit he asked—and what he asked was something enormous.

At the end of the week the owner of the saloon, apologizing profusely for mentioning anything so gross and vulgar as money, said:

"Mr. Garrison, you owe me one hundred and ninety-eight dollars."

Garrison bowed in a manner that would have done justice to Lord Chesterfield, and said courteously:

"My dear sir, I beg your pardon for contradicting you, but there must be some mistake. I don't owe you a cent."

Right then all politeness ceased, and the urbane Mr. Garrison was arrested and taken before the court for nonpayment of the bill.

After the complaining saloonkeeper had presented his evidence the polite defendant rose and addressed the court as follows:

"Your honor, I once studied law, but I am not a lawyer. I do not like lawyers. They are like statues, which neither dream nor drink. But I can prove to your honor that I do not owe this man any money at all, although I confess that I consumed in his barroom one hundred and ninety-eight dollars' worth of drinks. There is, however, a Virginia law prohibiting the sale of intoxicating liquors to habitual drunkards. Your honor, it grieves me to make this confession, but the ends of justice must be served. I am a habitual drunkard."

It could never have happened in any other place than Alexandria, but the solemn truth is that the judge released the polite and habitual drunkard, wiped out the debt, and deprived the saloonkeeper of his license.

"Windy" Wiggins

By Robert V. Carr

Author of "Topping the Market," "The Pride of Kid Caldwell," Etc.

Talk, talk, talk, and—talk! That was "Windy." But the stockyards man proves that "it's the feller with ideas that kicks the coin into the bank"

BILLY DAYTON was the crackin'est commission man in the yards, but his great fault was that he had no idea of the limit of human endurance. He figgered there wasn't anything he could not do, and so he sort of wrote the same thing down on the board for me.

It was the second summer I was on the road for Billy; and, believe me, I did some work. Besides, I'd only been married a few months, and Leona was sore on the road job. She wants me to let Paw-in-law Summers fix me up in business for myself, but I declines.

"Leona," says I, "I'm only a poor travelin' man, and you get my salary check every month—and I earn it myself. It's the best I can do at the present writin'. Poundin' shippers on the back is the only way I can gather in a couple of hundred hard iron bucks a month. If I get a sit-down job, we starve to death."

"Johnny," says Leona—she's a sweet girl and the finest that ever happened, though a trifle suspicious of me at times, which she has a right to be, perhaps—"you're away from me too much. Besides, papa has told you he would help you. Don't be so foolish, Johnny."

But nothin' doin' with me in the paw-in-law stakin' proposition. Johnny Reeves makes his own money, and supports his own wife. That's my system. What I get, I get myself, and nobody can say I laid down on 'em. Still, if anybody thinks that I had an easy life as a solicitor, they're so far off the range that you couldn't reach 'em with a special-delivery letter.

But I goes right on workin' for Billy Dayton. And that gets me back to what I started out to say. I believe if there was cattle on the moon, Billy would send me after them. He'd probably wire me:

Run up and land some of them moon shipments. We ain't gettin' our share.

That was Billy's way. Sometimes I thought he wasn't human, just a sort of a cross between a steel trap and a 'lectric dynamo. He never heard of the word "failure" until——

Say, did you ever hear of "Windy" Wiggins? No? Then your education hain't complete. I know, because I graduated from the Wiggins conservatory.

Mr. Windy Wiggins, Esquire, was a cowman—a little, dead-eyed feller, with a mouth like a duck's bill; big ears, nose drove into his face, and brocky complected. He was a trifle fleshy, and his boots were generally run over. There was no expression to speak of on his face, and his talk was about as entertainin' as a bunch of sheep.

Don't draw none of them magazine pictures of Windy. None of that short-spoken, eagle-eyed, hawk-nosed stuff about him. He was a pleasant little feller—if you don't care what you say, and you could tell what he had for dinner yesterday by lookin' at his vest. He was worth about two hundred thousand dollars, and when he'd come back

from the market, from shippin' his cattle, he would ride in the chair car and carry a lunch.

Windy's specialty was talk. He could talk at a mark, he could scatter conversation all day and all night, and never let up except to crook his elbow to take a drink. Even while he was drinkin', he'd give signs, so you'd have no show to break in. He sure liked to hear himself manufacture sounds.

Billy Dayton wanted Windy's cattle bad. He even tried to land 'em himself when he come out from Chicago to attend the spring stock meetin's in Dakota and Montana, but there didn't seem to be anything doin'. Windy had never shipped east of the Missouri River, and naturally that peeved Billy, who wants him to come on to Chicago, consigned to the Dayton Commission Company. But Windy was too much for Billy—Billy, who always said he couldn't spell the word "failure."

"Nail Wiggins in the fall," says Billy to me, kind of sad like, "but kill him before you start talkin' business to him. My head's a-ringin' yet, like I'd slept in a shingle mill. That man hain't a man; he's an annual report. Don't ever let him get near me again. Wow!"

I has to laugh when Billy tells me that. It showed me what I had to contend with. But it made me all the more determined to land Windy's shipments, just to show Billy that I was worth the money, and that there was class to my work.

So, 'long about the first of September, I meets Windy at his shippin' point. His cattle is due in about a week, and he's forty loads of fine heavy stuff.

"Yes, yes," says Wiggins, "I remember you well, very well. How's Mister Dayton? Met him at stock meetin' with the rest of the Chicago bunch. Fine little man—not much to say—like him—good, kind disposition——"

Windy had taken out his head gate, and the flood was on.

"Have a——"

"Drink? Yes, yes. Where do you get them clothes? My wife says I ought to get a suit of clothes—by Jakes, I ain't had no new duds since eighty-four—can't afford it—save your money, that's the stuff—save your money, and you'll wear diamonds. Speakin' of diamonds——"

"Have a——"

That's as far as I got.

"Drink? Yes, a little bourbon, if you will kindly—here's lookin' at you." He's now signalin' me with his left hand that he's goin' to say somethin' as soon as he gets his nose out of his glass. "Just thought of a joke—feller says to me—he's an Englishman—hossman—used to teach in a school in London—comes over here to run a hoss ranch—says he'd rather teach the American bronk than the British ass—laugh, say!—well, well, did you read about how the women are fussin' about wantin' to vote over it—hain't they kickin' up a lot of dust, though—we take a heap of papers out to the ranch—but I don't have much time to read—eyesight's gettin' poor—have to get me some new glasses, I guess—now, speakin' of glasses——"

"Mister Wiggins, your cattle——"

But there is no chance. Windy just releases himself, and *bing!*—he's off again, pourin' out words like a separator coughin' straw. But the old cutey never said nothin' about cattle, never a peep. He talked on everything but business, and there was no chance to interrupt him with anything except sudden death.

Say, but that man did make you feel helpless. All you could do was to stand and listen and wag your ears and bat your eyes. And Windy would keep right on a-grindin'—there was no let up, no stoppin' for feed or water, or whistlin' at the crossin'.

After a while you let go all hope and just drifted. Then, about that time, you'd get a blindin', ragin' headache, and have to back away from him. And you'd have to back quick, or he'd wrap a word around your neck before you knew it. But if you made your getaway in good order you needn't think you feezed him any. He'd just drift on down the street, slingin' conversation right and left, and everybody duckin' for cover. It was fierce.

Windy Wiggins had been married three times, and they say he talked his first two wives to death. I believe every word of it.

I didn't do nothin' with Windy at the first meetin', but I had a week to go on before his cattle got in, and there's always hope till the bull board drops down behind the last steer.

So I goes to my room and puts a hunk of ice on my head, to cool the place where Windy'd been bouncin' his words on. And, when I gets so I can roll a cigarette without jerkin', I begins to think and think hard, and finally I gets an idea; and, take it from me, there was class to that there little piece of brainwork. It was a cunnin' little thought with bells on.

After all, it's the mental strength that counts. These fellers that depend on their muscle and awkwardness to bring home the bacon are not there. The boy with the gray matter in his knob is ever the gobbler that wins the grand prize. Believe me, it's the feller with ideas that kicks the coin into the bank, and not the physical-culture bean-head with the big chest.

After supper, I drops into a drug store to buy some shavin' soap, and I says: "Might as well gimme some cotton, too."

Early the next mornin', I hooks onto Windy, and he shoves the speed lever on his talk box up to the last notch, and throws her wide open. He's feelin' fine, and his voice is in good form, as they say. And you ought to see how little Johnny Reeves listened to him. I leans right down to him, and stays there, happy and content, drinkin' in his precious words.

Windy talks steady all the forenoon on everything since the creation up to the last election. Then we has dinner. But he don't slow up much, even while he eats; sort of strains his words through his grub. Once he choked on a potato, but the sound he made stood for some word, and so nothin' was lost. I could tell that by the way he went on, pleased and happy to think he hadn't made any false motions.

After dinner we goes out on the hotel porch, and Windy still a-talkin'. He can't bear to be still, when the look on my face tells him that I am just simply a-hangin' on his next word. He's really a kind-hearted soul, and he hates to see any one hungerin' for talk. So he mops his head with his bandanna, loosens his clothes, and proceeds to unwind his mind.

The afternoon gradually wears away, and Windy still a-talkin' and me setttin' there, all wrapped up in what he's sayin'. We goes in to supper, and still Windy's pryin' words out of his intellect. Supper's the same thing as dinner, and then we falls into the hotel bar.

Some feller speaks to me, but I don't pay no attention to what he says—I'm that interested in Windy's chin music.

Ten o'clock, 'leven, twelve, one, two, three, and Windy still pourin' out language and me a-leanin' on his words like they's ready money.

But about four o'clock a. m., his jaw begins to sag and his eyes look wild. Still, I'm lookin' at his lips like a bird dog waitin' for a kind word. "Go on, go on," I says, speakin' for the first time since the mornin' before; "I so love to hear you talk."

Windy is game. He braces himself, and goes to it like a man fightin' for air.

Finally I steers him out of the bar, and leads him gently up to my room, makin' motions all the way to show that I begrudge sayin' a word myself, for fear I'll interrupt him. Poor old Windy sure appreciates me treatin' him that way. He shakes himself to keep awake, and goes on talkin', although I can see his heart action's weak, and that he interferes when he walks.

I put him in a straight-backed chair in my room, and then sets down and faces him with a hungry look in my eyes, a look that means: "Talk to me, dearie—I am so lonesome."

Does Windy do his best? He does. But he's beginnin' to scatter. He's shot off his mouth so much that it's leaded. He don't know whether he's shootin' high or low. There's a desperate look in his eye, and he's gettin' weak. He's lost control of his lips, and his tongue has the St. Vitus' dance.

Gradually he slows down, makin' feeble efforts to keep goin'. But he's all in. He's talked himself to a whisper.

It's been daylight a long time, and still I wait to hear Windy's precious words. He sees how interested I am, and tries to come back, but nothin' doin'. He's took the count.

Suddenly a great look of kindness comes over Windy's face, and he lays a hand on my knee, makin' signs with the other that he wants to tell me somethin', but can't.

"Is it about cattle?" I asks.

He nods.

"Your cattle?"

Another nod.

A big bunch of hope hits me, and I shoots the one question I'd been tryin' to fire at him since first we met.

"Will you ship to Billy Dayton?" I says, nice and easy.

Windy looks at me affectionate like, nods his head, and shakes my hand.

I then moves up my chair like I wanted some more talk, but Windy shakes his head sorrowfully, gets up all trembly and wabbly, and falls back on the bed, and is asleep before he hits the blankets.

Then I gets up and takes about *a pound of cotton out of each ear,* and lays down alongside of Windy Wiggins. I had not heard his voice for twenty-four hours until I heard him moan in his sleep, and then I am dead to the world for a day and part of a night.

Says Windy Wiggins to Billy Dayton when he lands in Chicago with his cattle: "That young Reeves feller got my business for the reason that he's the only man I ever met who really appreciates conversation and exchangin' ideas."



JABS AND GEOGRAPHY

ALL the farmers from the neighboring country had poured into Memphis, Tennessee, that day on an excursion, and the commanding figure of the crowd was a fellow who stood six feet four and had a back like an oak door, not to mention a thirst that was the biggest ever brought into that town. He draped himself against one bar, and, after taking eight drinks, remarked to nobody in particular and everybody in general:

"I can lick anybody in Memphis."

As nobody paid any attention to the remark, he went down the street, leaned against another bar, and took eight more drinks, after which he said, in an offhand manner:

"I can lick anybody in this county."

Again there was no response, and the warrior proceeded to his third saloon, where he bought and absorbed another eight drinks. By this time he was full of ideas and loose conversation, and several bystanders were listening to his remarks.

Finally he went further than ever before, and issued this challenge:

"I can lick any man in the State of Tennessee!"

A little fellow, thin and emaciated-looking, stepped out of the crowd, hit the big man on the jaw, and proceeded to give him a thorough beating. After the dust of battle had cleared away the big fellow staggered to his feet, leaned weakly against the bar, and said, with an absurd air of deliberation:

"I guess I kivered a leetle too much territory in that last remark of mine."

THE FADS OF A FINANCIER

Thomas W. Lawson, financier and author of "Frenzied Finance," has two great fads. One is the growing of rare and beautiful roses. The other is the collection of images of elephants. In his rooms in Boston he has elephants of all sizes, made of bronze, wood, and ivory.

The Ruling Passion

By Morgan Robertson

Author of "The Pirates," "When Jack Comes Home from Sea," Etc.

The mystery of the coffin ship—a square-rigged merchantman which was found with braces adrift, yards swinging wildly, and rolling idly in the trough of the sea; a newly painted ship but not a sign of life aboard her

IT was back in the days of the old wooden navy, when only a few of the bigger ships, frigates, and sloops carried auxiliary steam power. My ship, a gun-deck sloop, did not. We depended altogether upon the wind, hence our passage out to Sydney was long and tiresome, bringing the inevitable consequence, desertions among the crew. When ready to sail for Shanghai, finding difficulties in the way of filling our complement, the captain negotiated with the local authorities, to the result that about twenty-four men, sailors all, in prison for various offenses, signed in the American Navy as an alternative to their serving out their sentences, and were delivered on board. After a few days of drill they found their places, and we went to sea.

They were a hard lot; and, though we knew that no liquor had come aboard with them, yet, in a few days, a couple, or three or four at a time, were found intoxicated and confined in the brig. Even there the drunkenness continued, and a strict watch was placed to prevent demoralizing fluids being passed in to them; but, before the original crowd had sobered up, their number had increased to twelve; and by this time we were well up toward the Loyalty group, where, across a fairly calm sea, we sighted a square-rigged merchantman, with braces adrift, yards swinging wildly, and rolling idly in the trough. As we came up, we noticed, through the glasses, that there was no sign of life aboard; even the wheel was deserted.

"We'll back the main yards and send a boat," said the captain. "And Mr. Springer"—this to me—"you go along and investigate."

I was fourth lieutenant, a young fellow eager for adventure, and I cheerfully followed the men into the boat at the gangway. We pulled toward the wallowing craft, and noticed that she had been freshly painted outside, and her standing rigging newly tarred, while her masts were scraped bright and recently varnished. Though palpably a middle-aged ship, she shone and sparkled in the sunlight as if fresh from the shipbuilders.

Pulling under the stern, we made out her name, *East Wind,* of Bangkok; and I surmised that she was one of those American-built and foreign-owned ships that ply up and down the China Sea.

At the mizzen chains, the bowman made fast; and I climbed on board, going aft by the alley to the space abaft the house. Here, prone upon his back, lay a man with his head crushed in. Dead and cold, I found by a touch of his hand. I called for half the crew to come up; and, when they had climbed the rail, we went down the steps to the main deck.

Here was horror intensified. The deck was dotted with dead men. One, just forward of the companion door, showed a face marred beyond human similitude, and beside him lay a pistol, its hammer down upon the nipple, and one chamber discharged. A few feet away lay another, with a bullet hole in

his forehead, evidently caused by the bullet missing from the pistol. He was roughly dressed, with a sheath knife strapped to him, undoubtedly a sailor, while the other two were better clad, and seemed to be of the afterguard. And over toward the starboard rail lay another well-dressed man with a crushed skull, completing the trio of captain and two mates.

And there were others. The steward, as was evidenced by his white apron, lay close to the booby hatch, and his head also had been crushed; but these four were all that showed marks of violence. Scattered along the deck and in forecastle bunks we counted sixteen dead men, not one of whom showed a wound, or contusion, or mark of any kind to indicate what killed him. But, as they were all in a good state of preservation, the tragedy could not have occurred more than a few days before, and had occurred in the midst of work; for along the newly scraped pinrail were pots of varnish and paint, while the deck was littered with handspikes—used on the officers, no doubt—and nearly all the running gear was cast off the pins.

I descended into the cabin, finding it deserted, and overhauled the log book and the captain's papers. The last entry in the log had been made two days before; and in the "remarks column" was only reference to insolence to the mate by one man of the crew—nothing that bore upon the tragedy or its beginnings. The captain's papers showed that the ship was nineteen days out from Adelaide, bound for Hongkong.

Returning to the deck, I mustered my men into the boat and returned to the ship, where, surrounded by my fellow officers, I reported to the captain.

"Mutiny, no doubt," he grunted; "and murder; but, as to what killed the rest, you'll have to figure out, Mr. Springer. Want to take that ship into port? Can't spare you many men."

"I'll take her, sir," I answered. "Give me the twelve men in the brig. I'll get along. Where shall I take her, sir?"

"Back to Sydney. Discharge the men at the consul's office, and follow us to Shanghai. You may get there before we do."

So the twelve culprits, sober now, were mustered on deck and lined up. All were willing to go; all promised to work and obey orders as faithfully as though regularly signed; and all were glad to get out of the navy. So their bags were given them, and a list of their names given me. I tallied them off as they went down the gangway—Kenyon, Kellar, Macintosh, Wilson, O'Hara, Thompson, Devlin, Taylor, Mulligan, Brown, Miller, and Gall. The last was a giant of a man, worth retaining in the navy; but the exigencies demanded his release.

We were pulled to the derelict, and when aboard the boat put back; and I was left to my task. The first part of it was to get rid of the bodies, which we did with no service of prayer; for there was neither time nor sentiment for it. But big Gall and a few others uttered comments of recognition as they handled this old shipmate or that.

Then followed the clearing up of the decks. We tossed over the paint and varnish pots—for I did not feel called upon to polish up that ship for her owners—straightened the yards, and, under a mild, quartering breeze, squared away for Sydney on a course which I worked out from our own craft's position at noon.

I watched my men for a while as they toiled about the deck, washing off the blood and coiling up ropes, deciding at last that Gall was the most competent. I called him aft, questioned him, found that he knew something of navigation, and appointed him first mate.

Kenyon seemed next best, and I rated him second; while two cooks that I found among them, Kellar and Wilson, I relieved from standing watch. Kellar would cook for the crew, Wilson would care for the cabin and myself. As it was nearly dark now, the watches were chosen, four men to a side—a small force; but, as I only expected a few days' sail to Sydney, and as the weather was mild, I considered it enough.

But I had made one mistake. I

should have retained those pots on board and kept the men at work.

All went well that first night, and the next day. There was no wind to speak of; and, beyond the morning washing down of the deck, no work was done, except the occasional bracing of yards, and once taking off the hatches so that I might inspect the cargo. I found nothing but hides—packed to the beams; nothing of a nature to emit poisonous gases and kill sixteen men. I was puzzled over the mystery, but could find no solution. It was futile to think that they had all committed suicide after murdering the officers; for, though one or two might feel remorseful enough, sixteen would not. Something in the nature of poison had killed them undoubtedly; but where, and how, aboard ship, could there be found enough poison for the job?

I overhauled the medicine chest, however, but got no light. Not a bottle nor package had been opened. I went through the steward's storeroom, and, besides the usual stores, found two cases of brandy, and two of whisky—unopened; but I found no stray bottles; and in our first inspection of the ship had found no empty ones. Overdrinking of brandy or whisky might kill, I knew; but not a whole crew, without leaving some sign behind. No, there had been no looting of stores for sixteen men to drink to death and toss overboard the bottles before dying.

I gave it up for the time, and for the rest of the day watched closely my men as they lounged around the forehatch and went in and out of the forecastle. They were the typical merchant-sailor kind of men; and, though dressed in the working ducks of the navy, they lacked the smartness of the man-of-war's man, but possessed what the navy sailor does not—the curious expression of face, no matter what the type, due to the struggle of strong intelligence against ignorance. Merchant sailors need not be able to read or write, but they must be intelligent, or they could not survive. In their natural environment at sea they are like boys; ashore, like children.

Gall and Kenyon occupied the two mates' rooms at the forward end of the cabin. I occupied the captain's quarters in the after end; and I turned in that evening to a good night's sleep, troubled only by the unsolved mystery of the sixteen deaths. In the morning, I was wakened by the sounds of the watch washing down the deck, and by the clamor of angry voices.

Going up, I found Kenyon enforcing his position as second mate against the insolent derision of the others, to which was added the profane comments of the man at the wheel.

This would not do, I thought; and, after I had silenced the outbreak, I called Gall, and directed him to search for, or contrive, four clean paint pots. These men must be kept at work, I explained, and he agreed with me. The scraped pinrail had been but partly varnished, and there were several stanchions and a few "holidays"—bare spots—up aloft that would keep the watch on deck busy until I contrived other work.

So Gall produced the paint pots, and broached a new ten-gallon can of varnish in the paint locker, from which he filled the pots, and after breakfast the four on deck went to work scowlingly.

When the varnishing was done, I had Gall get out holystones, and kept the watch up in the afternoon at this most unpleasant of seamanly work. Their scowls increased, but there was no complaining; and, until a sailor complains, there is no danger of revolt. "Growl you may, but work you must," is the motto of the forecastle; and on this I depended.

They obeyed Kenyon's orders now without objection, and worked hard; it was what they were accustomed to, only Kenyon, one of themselves, had not been able to impress them. But next morning when I came on deck I found Gall leaning against the house with a puzzled, anxious, and doubtful expression of face, and two men stretched out on the main hatch.

"Dead," said Gall, when I inquired.

"Dead!" I repeated. "What killed them?"

"Don't know, sir," he answered. "I saw them tumble down about one bell, and when I called for buckets and brooms they didn't answer. I found 'em dead."

As he spoke, I thought, though I could not be sure, that I smelled liquor on his breath; but I most certainly smelled it when I passed to leeward of the man at the wheel. He looked stupid, and only by the aid of the wheel box could he hold himself erect.

I stepped down to the main deck and stood over the silent figures on the hatch. They were still warm, but emanated no fumes of alcohol. Their eyes were closed, and their faces peaceful, showing nothing of the expression of men who have died in pain.

The other man of the watch stood near the windlass, looking as anxious and doubtful as had Gall, and I questioned him. He, too, as he said, knew nothing about it; and, though I sought diligently for a whiff of his breath, I found no odor of alcohol. Still, I was convinced that there was liquor in the forecastle, and that these two men had overdrunk.

"Mr. Gall," I said, when I joined him, "after breakfast, clean out both forecastles, spread bedding, and overhaul dunnage. There is liquor forward."

"Aye, aye, sir!" he answered respectfully; "but if there is, I didn't know it."

"The man at the wheel is drunk now," I exclaimed hotly.

"If he is, sir, he didn't seem so to me. I haven't noticed it."

"You have been drinking yourself."

"No, sir," answered Gall, straightening up. "I haven't. Where could I get it, sir?"

"We'll know after breakfast."

As the wind was still light, and the steering not beyond the limited powers of the helmsman, I did not have him relieved, but went to breakfast. I was up at eight bells, however, and, when he was relieved, watched him stagger forward. He tumbled down the poop steps; but picked himself up and went on until he had reached the forecastle door; and here, with a gurgling groan that reached me on the poop, he flung up his arms, turned around in his tracks, and fell headlong to the deck.

I ran forward and joined the group of men surrounding him. I put my hand on his lips, on his chest; there was no breathing, nor heart action. He was dead.

"Put him on the main hatch beside the others," I commanded sternly, "and go to breakfast the watch."

After Gall had eaten his breakfast, there was not a trace of liquor on his breath; and he aided me mightily in my inspection of every bag, blanket, and receptacle, as well as every bunk and shelf in the two forecastles. We found nothing; and I sternly questioned each man separately as to what he knew of the matter. None knew anything. They were as troubled apparently as myself, and I sent the watch below, angry and rebellious against myself, in that I could not solve this problem.

We buried the three men at noon; and for a few days, though we made little progress toward Sydney, all went well. Once, however, I heard Gall's angry voice forward of the forecastle declaiming to the men. I thought I heard the word "fools."

The three men gone were Miller, O'Hara, and Thompson; and, in view of the limited number left, I sent Kenyon to the forecastle and stood his watch myself. It seemed to affect him beyond reason. He grumbled audibly, engaged in a fist fight with Devlin, and, being thrashed, voiced his opinion of me, of the ship and her crew, the navy, and all things in the heavens above and the earth beneath. Then he came aft at midnight to take the wheel, so drunk that he could hardly climb the poop steps. I watched him at the wheel a few moments, then called a man to relieve him.

Kenyon went forward in a staggering track, cursing furiously; but did not get past the main rigging. Here he reeled, and fell; and when I reached the spot he was dead.

We laid him out on the hatch, and I inspected the steward's storeroom again, with the idea that Kenyon, while aft,

had raided it; but nothing was missing; the cases had not been opened.

Arming myself—for I had in mind those four broken heads on the afterdeck—I called Gall from his berth, and we made a casual inspection forward. I had an idea that there might be a secret passage into the hold from the forecastle; but there was none, and the forehatch was battened down tightly. It would be a noisy half hour's job to open and close it, so I was convinced that it had not been disturbed. Under the topgallant forecastle we found nothing suspicious. There was no hatchway, and no hiding places but the paint and "bos'n's" lockers. These contained no liquor.

I sent Gall below; and in the morning, after breakfast, we gave Kenyon sea burial. Then I addressed the men, standing gloomy and anxious-faced before me.

"Men," I said, "you have seen four of your number go under from some deadly drink that you have found forward. Whatever it is, it must be what caused the mutiny by the former crew, and killed every one of the mutineers. I do not know what it is, and possibly you do not, either; but I appeal to your common sense and your love of life to let it alone. We will be in port in a few days, where you will be discharged with money; and if you want to drink you can do so without dying from the effects. I can say no more."

Then they declaimed, one and all—even my mate swearing vehemently with them that they had found no liquor, that they were as much in the dark as myself in regard to the deaths, and that even had they found any liquor they would not drink at sea. To which I replied that I smelled it on their breaths; but this they denied as vehemently. Utterly disgusted and discouraged, I dismissed them.

We were now so short-handed that I sent Wilson, my steward, forward to stand watch and work on deck; but there was no outbreak on his part, and the days went on quietly, with no more reeling and dying of poisoned men. Kellar, the cook, brought my meals to me; and I served out the stores myself, keeping him out of the storeroom, for I knew that men who would drink bad liquor would go farther to drink good.

Gall seemed to have assumed a position of armed neutrality. While he did his work faithfully, and in respect for me, and efficiency, was all that I could ask in a mate, yet I knew that he was in the secret—that he would not betray his friends, though he cautioned them continually. He was forward a good deal in his watch below; and I could hear his angry voice, but not what he said. So I could only hope that his influence would prevail; but when Macintosh came aft to the wheel one midnight, staggering a little, and emanating fumes of alcohol, I knew that it had not.

I said nothing to Macintosh, but watched him. Though drunk, he steered well, and I waited. Then, as the watch wore on, I noticed, when I called the other two—Brown and Mulligan—to the braces, that they, too, staggered in their movements.

We were now about abreast of Brisbane; and I would have squared away before the rising easterly breeze for this port had not the breeze shown such signs of continuance as to warrant me in going on to Sydney, only a couple of days' sail. So I held on; and at eight bells put all hands at the work of taking in royals and topgallant sails, for the breeze promised to become a gale. Brown and Mulligan had steadied somewhat under the influence of work and wind, while Macintosh, at the wheel, sobered more slowly, while steering a good trick; and, when the work was done, I sent them below, merely informing Gall that the drinking was resumed, and that I depended upon him to stop it.

Whatever he did in that morning watch I do not know; but when I came up at seven bells, I found the ship heeling over to a whole gale of wind; Taylor, at the wheel, making bad work of it, and an uproarious crowd forward, among which was Gall, staggering about, shouting and quarreling. I saw Gall hit one man, and separate two others who had begun to fight; so, judging that he

had them in hand, I turned my attention to Taylor. He reeked with the fumes, and could hardly stand up.

"Steady," I commanded, as the ship yawed wildly up into the wind. "Up with your wheel, man."

"Up it is," he growled, in answer, withholding the "sir" which age-old custom has decreed a sailor must accord an officer.

"Mr. Gall," I shouted. "If you've got a sober man forward, send him aft to the wheel."

"Aye, aye, sir," answered Gall; and he drove Devlin, who reeled but little, aft and up the steps, following a little unsteadily himself.

"What's this?" shouted Devlin, as he came aft by the alley. "I've shteered wan trick a'riddy this watch. Do I shteer 'em all?"

"Take the wheel," I ordered, as he drew near.

"An' what if I say no?" he demanded, scowling truculently at me.

I was reduced to my lowest terms. I was not on board a man-of-war with a squad of marines at my back; but I knew the merchant mate's remedy for insubordination, and in a second had launched forth my fist, catching Devlin on the chin, and sending him staggering back into the arms of the mate, who had followed close.

He was not knocked out, though he lay quiet against the mate for a moment, blinking his eyes; then, with a long, deep breath, he stepped toward the wheel and took the spokes from Taylor. My blow seemed not only to have subdued, but sobered him; and I had a passing thought that the remedy, with the help of the mate, might work upon the rest. But in a moment the hope left me. The mate spoke, thickly and angrily, while his breath belched alcohol fumes into my face.

"Whatcha hit 'im fur?" he asked, steadying himself against the house. "That's no way to treat men. Leave 'em to me. I'll do the hittin', an' do it where it doesh mos' good. Hear me?"

A drunken sailor was one thing, a drunken mate another. I drew my revolver and leveled it at his face.

"Mr. Gall," I said sternly, "you're drunk yourself, but may not know it. Take this man Taylor forward and drive the cook into the galley to get breakfast. Quickly, or I'll shoot you dead."

He answered respectfully at once, and turned toward Taylor, who had reached the lee alley, and now clung to the rail, unable to proceed. As Gall touched him, he let go the rail, and, sagging backward, stretched out at full length, his features twitching convulsively, and his fingers closing and unclosing. He uttered no sound, and in a moment was still.

"Another!" said the mate, mentally, if not physically, sobered by the sight. "Another! This won't do—won't do at all. Lay aft here two hands," he roared to the men, "and carry this man for'ard."

They all came—Wilson, Kellar, Mulligan, Brown, and Macintosh—more or less staggering and noisy. But the sight of Taylor quieted them down, and they lifted him off the poop to the now familiar laying-out spot—the main hatch. Then Gall, who had accompanied them, drove Kellar, the cook, into the galley, and the others to the forecastle. The four went in, and two came out; for, when Kellar announced breakfast, only Wilson and Mulligan answered; Brown and Macintosh remained in their bunks until carried out to lie beside Taylor on the hatch.

We buried them after breakfast, and I took stock. My crew was now reduced to Gall, the mate; Kellar, the cook, and Devlin, Wilson, and Mulligan, sailors. Mulligan had taken the wheel; and his breakfast had apparently sobered him, for he steered well.

The ship was spinning along on her side; and if all went well we would make Sydney by daylight next morning; but should things not go well—should the wind increase or should more men die, I could foresee nothing but disaster. We were under upper and lower topsails, two headsails, and reefed spanker; but any farther shortening down would be past the powers of the few men left; while furling sail—except for

the spanker and jibs—was out of the question.

But another job requiring men and muscle was the getting ready the anchors. I went forward and examined them. The best anchor was to port, the lighter one to starboard; and both were swung inboard on the topgallant forecastle, and lashed together.

The ship carried a patent windlass—an innovation in those days—and on each topgallant rail a grooved casting, which I knew was intended to catch and hold the fluke of the anchor as it rested without the rail, ready for dropping.

With this contrivance one man could let go anchor. So, without allowing the dazed men more than their after-breakfast smoke, I had them up, mate, cook, and all, to haul, and heave, and pry those anchors over to the rails until they hung outside; the flukes in the chocks, and the heavy weights held from slipping by one turn of the shank painter—a small chain passed around the shank, and belayed to a cleat. They worked sullenly but quietly, perhaps because at the beginning I had reminded them that cold lead was quicker in its results than bad whisky.

"Now, then, you drunken dogs," I said when the work was done. "Down on the main deck with you all, and get at that holystoning. You, too, Gall, I said. And you, too, Kellar. There'll be no drinking this day, for I'll have you under my eye, and there'll be no more cooking. You'll eat hard-tack and drink cold water."

They grumbled and muttered, but obeyed me; and all day long, with an hour's intermission at noon, when they nibbled hard bread on deck while I watched them, they worked the holystones, with no respite except when, every two hours, one would relieve the wheel. I nibbled hard bread myself, and kept a lookout. There were many craft on the horizon, but none near enough to signal, else I might have been tempted to appeal for help. But to do so would have advertised my helplessness, and I was satisfied to keep my course.

When darkness closed down, I sent Kellar to the galley to cook supper, but kept them grinding away until it was cooked. Then they put away the stones and ate it. They were thoroughly tired out; and I hoped that their fatigue would induce sleep that would endure until morning; for I intended to remain awake all night myself, and ignore watch and watch, except that every two hours the wheel would be relieved. I cared little if canvas blew away, provided enough was left to keep steerageway when we reached Sydney in the morning.

A heavy sea was making, and we rode along, sinking bodily in the trough, and rising to the crests on a fairly even keel, except for the heavy list to starboard.

Gall had the wheel from eight to ten in the first watch, and he steered well, but was sullen in his answers to me. I did not take him up. In a few hours I hoped to be rid of them all; and any enforcement of sea etiquette in this exigency seemed to be a waste of effort. But I was forced to consider him when, at about three bells, oaths and shouts came from forward.

"In the name of Heaven, Gall," I said, "what's this? Are they at it again?"

"You worked them too hard, sir," he answered. "You'd take a drink yourself if you were as tired as we are."

Perhaps he was right. Perhaps I *had* overdone it, and induced a bodily fatigue that, more than anything else, will impel the average man to drink. But, in any case, the mischief was done. They were out on deck, yelling and cursing; and I dimly saw in the darkness that they were coming aft—Wilson, Kellar, Devlin, and Mulligan—though I could not distinguish one from another. I heard the rattle of capstan bars as they robbed the midship rack; and to meet this menace, I advanced to the break of the poop, and called to them.

"Stay forward," I said. "The first man that climbs these steps goes back headfirst."

They halted a moment, while they cursed me and reviled me for a slave driver, a brass-bound pet, a son of a shoemaker, and other things better imag-

ined than described. Then they charged in a body; and I sent a bullet over their heads. It halted them for a moment, but they again came on. I sent another bullet, and they stopped at the foot of the steps.

"I will kill you all," I said, "if you do not immediately put those handspikes away and go below." Then I fired a third bullet, but not to hit.

It decided them. They backed away, flung the handspikes to the deck, and staggered forward, while I changed my partly emptied cylinder for a full one in my pocket. They disappeared in the port forecastle, and I heard no more of them that night, or later, though I saw one stagger out and pass forward of the house. They died that night. At daylight I found Kellar sprawled out on the forward deck beside the hatch, and the other three cold and quiet in their bunks.

Gall had steered all night, and huskily asked me to give him a "spell," but I refused.

"I need you alive," I said. "When I get this ship into the harbor, I'll take the wheel while you drop the anchor. Then you can do as you like—live, or die like the rest."

He threatened to drop the wheel, but I showed him my pistol, and threatened to drop him in his tracks. He was sober enough to value his life, and steered on.

There was land under the lee, and I soon made out the light on Outer North Head. I shifted the course, and the ship sped on like a race horse. A pilot boat hove to in our path, and, signaling, was left behind. I could not stop that ship for a pilot, and did not feel that I needed one. I conned her in past the outer point, squared away dead before the gale, and, with a port wheel, rounded to under the lee of Inner North Head.

Then I took the wheel, and sent Gall forward to drop the anchor at my order. He went, dragging his legs wearily, mounted the forecastle as the canvas caught aback, and cast off the shank painter of the big anchor. I watched the water, and, as the ship took on sternway, I called out: "Let go."

He immediately let go the ring stopper, and the anchor slid off the rail and plunged, dragging the chain after it. Gall, an able seaman from his head to his heels, seized the friction lever, and stood ready to check it, looking back at me for instructions. I sang out to let it slip out, and leisurely joined him. I took the lever from his hands, and he said:

"Thank you, sir, I'm dead beat."

Then, his work done, he went down the steps, while I paid out chain, checking it occasionally until with fifty fathoms out, I felt that the anchor had bit.

Then I looked for Gall; and, as he was not in sight, I descended the forecastle steps. He was under the topgallant forecastle, half into the paint locker, with his back to me. He was pouring varnish from the big can into a pot, and I silently watched him. When the pot was full, he began stirring it vigorously, faster and faster, until, as I could see, the centrifugal force lifted the varnish to the rim of the pot. Then he suddenly raised the pot, and, from the hollow center of the still-revolving varnish, he drank deeply of the separated wood alcohol.

This was what they had drunk. This was what had killed them, even Gall. He raised up, looked at me with tired, weary eyes, then staggered past me. I could do nothing for him, except hope that he would survive. But, before he had reached the forecastle door, he gurgled, choked, and fell to the deck.

A Chat With You

F. A. MASON, head of the Mason Jewelry Company, of Centreville, Indiana, who has subscribed to the magazine for several years, writes to tell us that he likes it, and that it is getting better all the time. Then he comes to the principal point in his letter. He writes as follows:

"What I am writing about is this—I have been enabled several times during the last four or five years to get what is called a 'Life Subscription' in several magazines in which I am interested, and I would like to know if you would consider making up a 'Life Club' so that by one payment one could get THE POPULAR as long as he lived, without further payment. I would appreciate it if you would let me know your views on this subject, for if you would consider it favorably, I would esteem it a favor if I could be the first to get on that 'Honor Roll.'"

We have already written Mr. Mason, thanking him for the kind words in the first part of the letter which we did not quote, and telling him that we had never thought of a "life club." In regard to THE POPULAR, we have only one big purpose. We want to give you the biggest and best magazine possible twice a month, and we want every one who wants it to get it. We are turning out the *biggest magazine value in the world* for fifteen cents. We couldn't sell it for less and keep up the quality. We don't want to collect money for life subscriptions. We prefer to make the magazine so good that you can't stop either subscribing or buying it at the stands. We think we can do this. Don't you think we are right in bending all our energies in this direction? Don't you think it is better for us to keep on jumping the magazine in quality and let you attend to the "life memberships"?

SPEAKING of letters, it is our wish to answer all we receive. If you don't send your address, however, we can't answer you. Or if you are a traveling man on the road and write from a hotel where you are stopping for only a few days it is likely that our answer will come back to us instead of reaching you. We have on hand now a long and interesting letter from a gentleman in Shanghai. If we published it all it would fill more than these two pages devoted to "chat." He says that he has read the magazine from the first number to the last issue he could get his hands on, and notices a wonderful and steady improvement in the magazine. He asks us when we are going to announce that the present number of the magazine is "the best" and let it go at that. We answer him that we don't know. We are going to try to make the magazine better as long as it is possible to do so. He signs to his letter the pen name "Makao San," and says that there is a card inclosed. The card did not reach us. It was not in the envelope when we opened it. We would

like to write to "Makao San." If he chances to read this will he send us his name and address in Shanghai?

THE complete novel in the next issue of the magazine is called "In the Dark." It is written by W. B. M. Ferguson, who wrote "The Serles Case," "The Freebooter," and a few other stories which you remember just as well as we do. This new novel of his is the tale of a Westerner, an energetic young man who came alone to New York from Goldfield, Nevada, to have a good time. He plunged headlong into a romance of the most exciting kind. What New York did to him, and what he did to some of the New Yorkers, the narrative of his adventures during the first night in the city is one of the most interesting and exciting things that Ferguson has ever written. The whole action of the novel takes place in a single night, but before daylight the Westerner has made both friends and enemies, has found adventure and settled one thing for life. Some stories suit some people, some suit others, this is the kind that every one likes.

FOLLOWING on Ferguson's novel is a detective story by Daniel Steele. It is four or five times as long as the average short story, almost long enough for a short book. It is one of the strangest and at the same time one of the best mystery stories we have ever read anywhere. It is called "The Good Man's Double." There's a new experience for you in it, a new sort of thrill, a new charm of interest. That's why we are calling special attention to it.

SPEAKING of stories of mystery, do you remember reading either "The Hemlock Avenue Mystery" or "The Red House on Rowan Street," by Roman Doubleday. They are published in book form by Little, Brown & Co., but they made their first appearance in the pages of THE POPULAR. If you read them you remember them as two of the best stories of their kind published in a long time. There is another coming by the same author. It will appear in the number of THE POPULAR out on the news stands a month from to-day. It is called "The Saintsbury Affair," and undoubtedly is a better story than either of its predecessors. We will tell you more about it in our next "chat" in two weeks.

GETTING back to the next issue of the magazine out on the stands two weeks from to-day, it will contain a splendid story of the prize ring by C. E. Van Loan, who knows other things just as well as he does baseball. Then there is a story of college life by Ralph D. Paine. In it you will meet again Jim Stearns, Hector Alonzo McGrath, and a few more of our old friends at Yale. Then there is a vivid story of the West, "Desert Judgment," by Laurence Yates, and a story of the railroad yard by Francis Lynde. There's another good Western story, "Law and the Classics," by Charles Alden Seltzer, the story of a South American revolution by Arthur Stanley Riggs, and "Sunfish," the story of a bucking broncho, by H. A. R. MacDonald. This isn't all—it's just a cursory glance at the contents page. But we haven't stopped improving. We haven't come to a point when we intend or can afford to rest on our laurels. We are still growing, just as fast as ever, still improving—still moving and living. Don't talk to us about saying "the best" and letting it go at that.

WHY MAN OF TODAY IS ONLY 50 PER CENT. EFFICIENT

By WALTER GRIFFITH

If one were to form an opinion from the number of helpful, inspiring and informing articles one sees in the public press and magazines, the purpose of which is to increase our efficiency, he must believe that the entire American Nation is striving for such an end—

And this is so.

The American Man because the race is swifter every day: competition is keener and the stronger the man the greater his capacity to win. The stronger the man the stronger his will and brain, and the greater his ability to match wits and win. The greater his confidence in himself the greater the confidence of other people in him: the keener his wit and the clearer his brain.

The American Woman because she must be competent to rear and manage the family and home, and take all the thought and responsibility from the shoulders of the man whose present-day business burdens are all that he can carry.

Now what are we doing to secure that efficiency? Much mentally, some of us much physically, but what is the trouble?

We are not really efficient more than half the time. Half the time blue and worried—all the time nervous—some of the time really incapacitated by illness.

There is a reason for this—a practical reason, one that has been known to physicians for quite a period and will be known to the entire World ere long.

That reason is that the human system does not, and will not, rid itself of all the waste which it accumulates under our present mode of living. No matter how regular we are, the food we eat and the sedentary lives we live (even though we do get some exercise) make it impossible; just as impossible as it is for the grate of a stove to rid itself of clinkers.

And the waste does to us exactly what the clinkers do to the stove; make the fire burn low and inefficiently until enough clinkers have accumulated, and then prevent its burning at all.

It has been our habit, after this waste has reduced our efficiency about 75 per cent., to drug ourselves; or after we have become 100 per cent. inefficient through illness, to still further attempt to rid ourselves of it in the same way—by drugging.

If a clock is not cleaned once in a while it clogs up and stops; the same way with an engine because of the residue which it, itself, accumulates. To clean the clock, you would not put acid on the parts, though you could probably find one that would do the work, nor to clean the engine would you force a cleaner through it that would injure its parts; yet that is the process you employ when you drug the system to rid it of waste.

You would clean your clock and engine with a harmless cleanser that Nature has provided, and you can do exactly the same for yourself as I will demonstrate before I conclude.

The reason that a physician's first step in illness is to purge the system is that no medicine can take effect nor can the system work properly while the colon (large intestine) is clogged up. If the colon were not clogged up the chances are 10 to 1 that you would not have been ill at all.

It may take some time for the clogging process to reach the stage where it produces real illness but, no matter how long it takes, while it is going on the functions are not working so as to keep us up to "concert pitch." Our livers are sluggish, we are dull and heavy—slight or severe headaches, come on—our sleep does not rest us—in short, we are about 50 per cent. efficient.

And if this condition progresses to where real illness develops, it is impossible to tell what form that illness will take, because—

The blood is constantly circulating through the colon and, taking up by absorption the poisons in the waste which it contains, it distributes them throughout the system and weakens it so that we are subject to whatever disease is most prevalent.

The nature of the illness depends on our own little weaknesses and what we are the least able to resist.

These facts are all scientifically correct in every particular, and it has often surprised me that they are not more generally known and appreciated. All we have to do is to consider the treatment that we have received in illness to realize fully how it developed, and the methods used to remove it.

So you see that not only is accumulated waste directly and constantly pulling down our efficiency by making our blood poor and our intellect dull—our spirits low and our ambitions weak, but it is responsible through its weakening and infecting processes for a list of illnesses that if catalogued here would seem almost unbelievable.

It is the direct and immediate cause of that very expensive and dangerous complaint—appendicitis.

If we can successfully eliminate the waste all our functions work properly and in accord—there are no poisons being taken up by the blood, so it is pure and imparts strength to every part of the body instead of weakness—there is nothing to clog up the system and make us bilious, dull and nervously fearful.

With everything working in perfect accord and without obstruction, our brains are clear, our entire physical being is competent to respond quickly to every requirement, and we are 100 per cent. efficient.

Now this waste that I speak of cannot be thoroughly removed by drugs, but even if it could the effect of these drugs on the functions is very unnatural, and if continued becomes a periodical necessity.

Note the opinions on drugging of two most eminent physicians:

Prof. Alonzo Clark, M. D., of the New York College of Physicians and Surgeons, says: "All of our curative agents are poisons, and as a consequence, every dose diminishes the patient's vitality."

Prof. Joseph M. Smith, M. D., of the same school, says, "All medicines which enter the circulation poison the blood in the same manner as do the poisons that produce disease."

Now, the internal organism can be kept as sweet and pure and clean as the external and by the same natural, sane method—bathing. By the proper system warm water can be introduced so that the colon is perfectly cleansed and kept pure.

There is no violence in this process—it seems to be just as normal and natural as washing one's hands.

Physicians are taking it up more widely and generally every day, and it seems as though everyone should be informed thoroughly on a practice which, though so rational and simple, is revolutionary in its accomplishments.

This is rather a delicate subject to write of exhaustively in the public press, but Chas. A. Tyrrell, M. D., has prepared an interesting treatise on "The What, The Why, The Way" of the Internal Bath, which he will send without cost to any one addressing him at 134 West 65th Street, New York, and mentioning that they have read this article in The Popular Magazine.

Personally, I am enthusiastic on Internal Bathing because I have seen what it has done in illness as well as in health, and I believe that every person who wishes to keep in as near a perfect condition as is humanly possible should at least be informed on this subject; he will also probably learn something about himself which he has never known through reading the little book to which I refer.





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How is it done? Read the next page!

How is it done? Read the next page!



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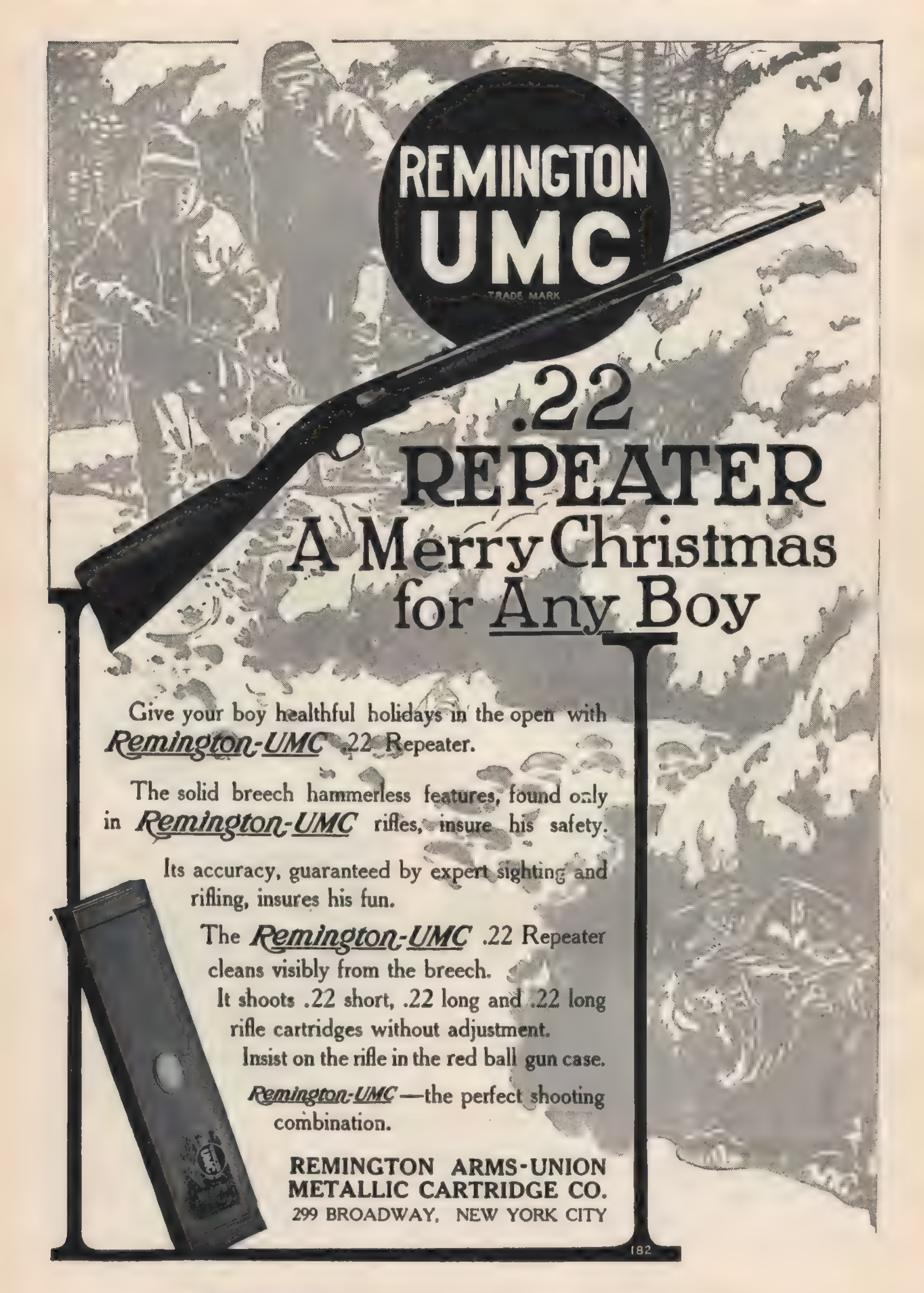
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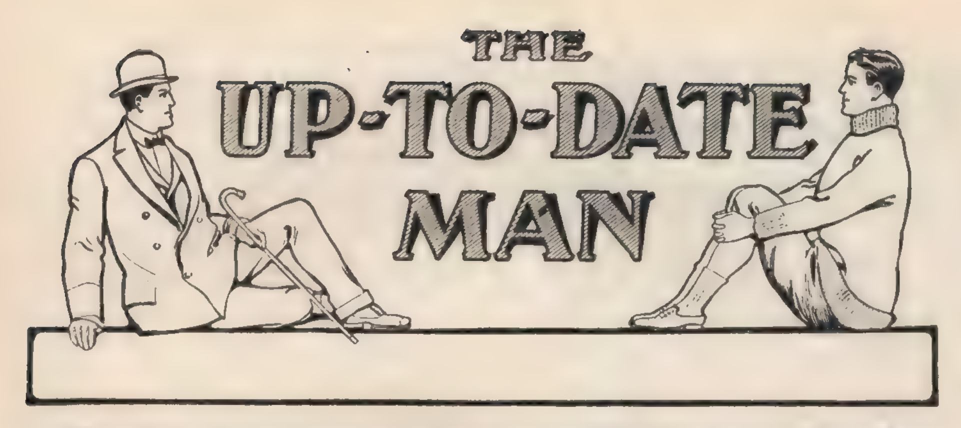
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The readers of the magazine may write to this department about any problem of dress. Every question will be promptly answered, provided that a stamped, self-addressed envelope is enclosed.

FOR wear over one's evening suit, the raglan is the handiest greatcoat of all. It is long, loose, and silk-lined, and the nonbinding shoulders and free sweep of skirt render it engagingly easy to slip into and out of. The Inverness—cape coat—is another notably "smart" overgarment this season. It is much worn in the foreign capitals, at the army and navy clubs and the like, and Americans are just awakening to its distinguished, courtly air. It is the preferred coat of clubmen and playgoers.

Many men wear too tight a greatcoat over their evening clothes, thus crumpling them and feeling, besides, acutely uncomfortable. Your evening outer coat should, above all others, be roomy, with a straight drop from the shoulders and a broad skirt for comfort.

Usually the fabrics are simple black, though dark gray is also used. The cut of the evening greatcoat is very plain, with no tinge of ornateness about it. All that the best-dressed men countenance is the rolled-back cuff.



Evening Dress Accessories.

At the coronation in London, the best-dressed Englishmen wore their soft hats pulled well down over the head, with the effect pictured in the attendant sketch. This lends an undeniably "smart" air, for more lies in the manner one wears a soft hat than in the hat itself.

It takes a bit of looking-glass practice to decide just what tilt or angle best befits the individual type of face and cast of features. Often a mere tweak of thumb and forefinger makes the difference that spoils distinction.

A little thing, you say? Granted, but correct dress is made up of seeming trifles. It's the man who gives himself "the personal touch" the smack of self—who towers above the "ninety-and-nine."

Few men need to be told to tub, shave, file their finger nails, and keep their linen impeccable. These things are fundamental and instinctive. One does them as automatically as sugaring one's coffee.

Correct dress, however, is the wearer's personality in cloth. It should subtly reflect and delicately interpret

the man. While conforming to the code of custom and convention, it should yet radiate intense individuality.

The leaning toward open-front collars, rather than those with close-meeting edges, is marked. The form shown here is much approved, because it lets one wear a full-knot scarf, instead of the narrow, stringlike four-in-hand long dear to freshmen and sophomores.

To be sure, scarf patterns are not governed by the mode, and anything that is tasteful serves well enough. However, Persian designs are both quaint and rich, and the autumn patterns show an unusual sprinkling of them.



Day Dress Details.

Since the fashionable waistcoat is high cut and reveals very little of one's scarf, brilliantly colored "batwing" ties are having a bit of a run. These are knotted into a soft, loose bow with wide ends.

The fashionable autumn boot has a narrow toe tapering to a point, though it is in no sense "pointed." The heel is broad and flat. "Wing tips" and all manner of "punching" have lost caste.

Dark-brown russet boots preserve their vogue. They are always laced, never buttoned, and the leather should be dully varnished, not glitteringly polished.

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Russell Sage said: "There is a common fallacy that, while for legal advice we go to lawyers, and for medical advice we go to physicians, and for the construction of a great work, to engineers—financing is everybody's business. As a matter of fact, *it is the most profound and complicated of them all.*"

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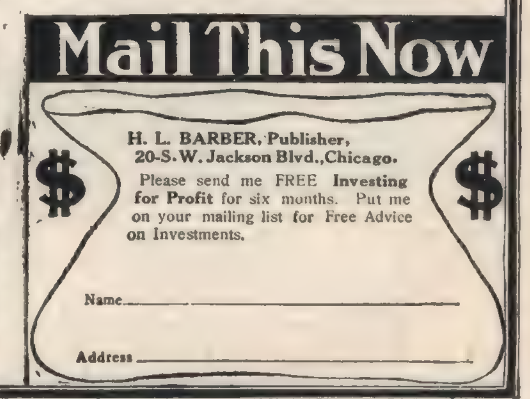
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evening modes from season to season. The incidental of a cuff or a lapel may swerve, but the essentials of cut and contour do not budge. The well-cut autumn coat is very soft and supple, with close-clipped shoulders, undulating lapels, and a slightly curved-out chest to lend an aspect of comfortable fullness.

About one's evening coat there should not be a trace of stiffness—not a rigid line. The lapels and front edges should form an unbroken roll. Coats are decidedly "waisty"—that is, the waistline is sharply defined both at the sides and back, and the skirts have a bit of a "spring" and reach about to the crook of the knee.

Trousers are cut high enough to show the ribbon on one's pump. They are roomy at the hip, and taper toward the foot. The "smart" coat collar is notched, and the lapel is broad and peaked with a buttonhole for the boutonnière. The suiting stuffs are plain or black patterned with "ditto" stripes.

Double-breasted sack suits are gaining in favor. The lapels are deep and sweeping, and the sides of the jacket are well arched to the figure. Of course, this garment is cut with a high waist, a short flare, and rolled lapels, as all the modish autumn jackets are.

If you can find a "happy" tint of brown, it's high caste. Blue flecked with red, brown tinged with purple, grays shading into blue, and like mixtures are capital for early autumn. On account of the high-cut waistcoat so notably in vogue this season, more bow ties will accompany lounge suits. These ties are vividly colored with brilliant stripes.

The newer "swallowtail" coats are all ripples and curves, the lapels being so soft and pliant that they dissolve into the coat front. Trousers are still cut a bit high, so as to show the pump bow. White silk hose with black side clocks are a London idea that might as well never have crossed, for to wear them is to make one's self a target for curious eyes. On the other hand—or rather, foot—black silk hose with white side clocks are both "smart" and appropriate, and one sees them at many of the fashionable gatherings.

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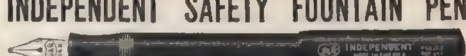
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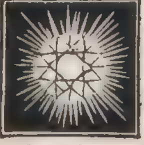


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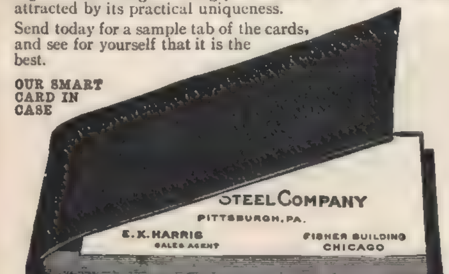
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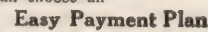


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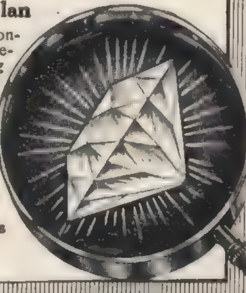
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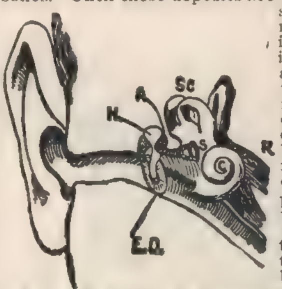
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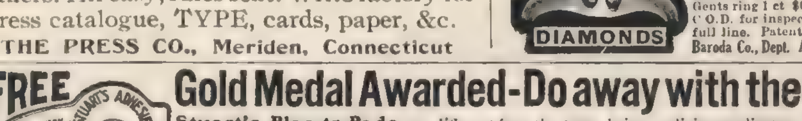
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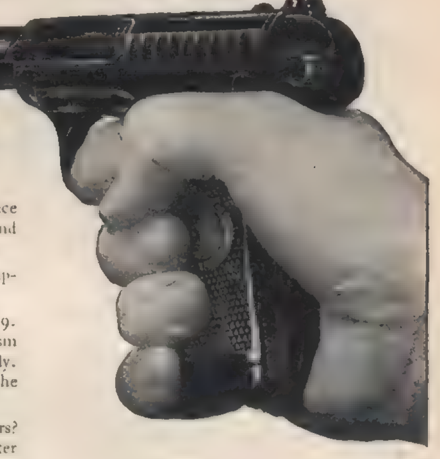
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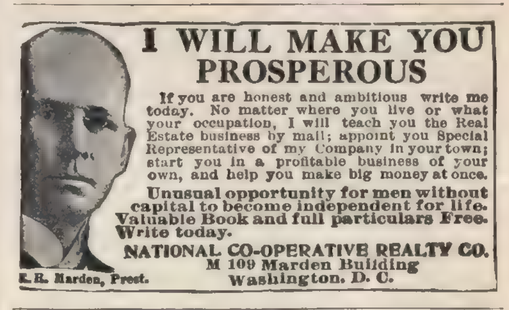
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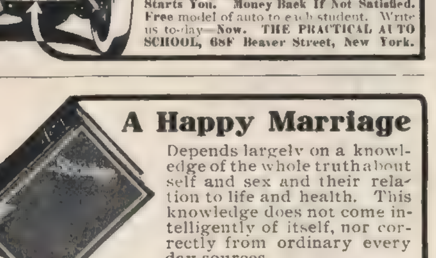












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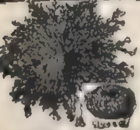
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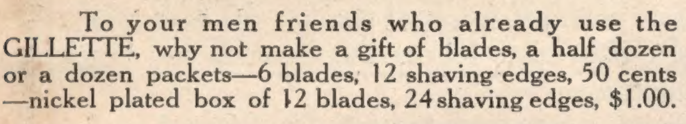
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